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# THE AARON BURR CONSPIRACY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTIES OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOLS OF ARTS,  
LITERATURE, AND SCIENCE, IN CANDIDACY FOR THE  
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BY

WALTER FLAVIUS MCCAULEY

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# The Aaron Burr Conspiracy





# *The Aaron Burr Conspiracy*

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*A History largely from original and  
hitherto unused sources*

*By*

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TO  
HERMANN EDUARD VON HOLTZ  
TEACHER AND FRIEND



# Preface



FOR a century the conspiracy of Aaron Burr has been a puzzling theme. Apart from the distinguished figures that move across its stage, the nature of the enterprise from its very extravagance must always engage the attention of those who care to know something of the United States in its Heroic Age.

The conspiracy was of much wider and deeper origin than has been usually supposed, and the conditions which gave rise to it, as well as the events with which it was vitally connected, have received scant treatment from historians. Social and political upheavals are not growths of a night, but are the results of the workings of real and definite causes which are traceable in every case and susceptible of some degree of analysis. Burr's project is no exception to this general law. And happily we are now far enough removed from his time to see more clearly the perspective of events, and to measure with more certainty the motives and conduct of men.

In the discussion of the subject writers have in nearly every case failed to distinguish between the conspiracy and Aaron Burr—in other words, they have attempted

to explain it through the character of Burr himself, a procedure which is fundamentally erroneous. Burr's character was apparently never more seriously involved, and never reflected more disastrously upon the conspiracy, than in the correspondence of Merry and Yrujo—the ministers respectively of Great Britain and Spain—to whom he ostensibly disclosed his designs. If the revelations of the ministers could be accepted at their face value, treason was in Burr's mind, and the separation of the West from the Union was his plot, open and avowed. However, viewing the correspondence as a whole, in conjunction with other facts which cannot here be discussed, it appears certain that Burr's intrigue with Merry and Yrujo was but a consummate piece of imposture. In order to secure funds for the carrying out of his expedition against Mexico, Burr resorted to the expedient of playing on the hatred of the European powers for the American Republic. Could they be brought to contribute moneys to aid in the sundering of the States? Burr thought so, and to secure the sum he conceived to be necessary for his purposes he never scrupled at discoursing of treasons, although at the moment every step he was taking looked toward an invasion of the Spanish territories.

No weight can be placed upon Merry's and Yrujo's letters as concerns the nature of the conspiracy, except indeed in a negative sense; and I say this with all deference to Mr. Henry Adams and those who have laid so much stress on these manuscripts, maintaining that they

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lay bare the heart of the conspiracy. The heart of the conspiracy, however, was far removed from any communication of Burr's. The conspiracy was an affection of society—Burr was but a member of that society, an agent. It follows that if the nature of the conspiracy is to be disclosed, it can only be through an examination into the state of that society whose social, political, and traditional affiliations gave rise to it. This is basic. That the ideas of Burr, whatever they may have been, necessarily betray the secret of the movement, cannot be successfully maintained. But that the prevailing impression of Burr's character lent weight to the imputation of treason cannot be doubted; nor more can it be doubted that the isolation of the West, together with the ignorance of the East concerning the pioneers who built their log cabins in the wilderness beyond the Alleghany Mountains, tended to distort extraordinarily the affair in the public mind. What were the ideas, then, prevailing in the Western country? Was there a contingent that plotted disunion? Was there a party that clamored loudly for war against whatever power insulted the Republic? Of the first there is no trace worth considering; of the latter there is evidence in abundance. The spirit of the Westerners is proclaimed in no uncertain voice, and if its tone could have been mistaken in 1806, there was no doubting its meaning in 1812, when, in spite of the opposition of New England, the Second War with Great Britain was forced. And yet this was done by the very men upon whom

Burr had counted, and the greatest leaders in that struggle had been his associates. If we look more closely we shall see, what has been but too timidly suggested, that it was the West and South that took up the burden of the Republic when it had well nigh wearied of the load.

As for the conspiracy, patriotism was but one of its elements. For him who reads the secret of the Anglo-Saxon character, there is epitomized in the movement the whole course of the race that threw down the bulwarks of Rome, that terrorized Europe in a Viking's fleet, that conquered the Western World, and that looks confidently forward to the time when the struggle for universal supremacy shall test its powers. Expansion—conquest—was the keynote of the conspiracy;—it is the keynote of the history of the race.

This narrative of the conspiracy of Aaron Burr has been in large part written from original and hitherto unused sources of information. It must not be thought, however, that the work of scholars in this field has been ignored; on the contrary, I have made much use of it, but never intentionally without due credit either in text or notes. I have not found it expedient, however, to point out even the most glaring anachronisms in many of the secondary narratives which treat of the conspiracy; much less have I attempted to indicate divergences of opinion—and there are divergences as wide as misdemeanor is from treason.

In the endeavor to make this study exhaustive much



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time has been expended in searching for new data. Brief mention must therefore be made of the various sources which have been consulted, and of the materials exploited.

In 1896 documents relating to the conspiracy were discovered in the Bexar Archives at San Antonio, the Spanish capital of the Province of Texas. From early in the eighteenth century, much of the correspondence of the provincial Governors with the Captains-General and Viceroys of Mexico found lodgment in the musty files of the archives of the province. It is needless to say that they contain many manuscripts which are concerned with the westward growth of the United States and with the uninterrupted conflict which was waged with the retreating civilization of Spain. The views of the officers of Carlos IV. in that quarter as to the nature of the conspiracy are illuminating. They rightly classed it as a manifestation of the restless, encroaching activity of the nation which fate had placed on their borders.

The archives of the State of Texas contain materials dating from the Spanish régime and are of value on more than one doubtful point.

The Viceroyalty of Mexico on account of the prominent position it held among the Spanish colonies became the great center for the accumulation of official correspondence; and the treasure of manuscripts now contained in the *Archivo General de México*, Mexico City, is of inestimable value to the history of the New

World, and in an almost equal measure to that of Europe. Although we have ignored as far as possible the presence of the Spanish civilization in the affairs of America, and have remained blind to the tremendous formative and directive influence which it has exerted on the course of our national growth, it is from this collection that our own history is to be enriched and brought nearer to truth. The Departments of Marine, War, and the Provinces, together with the correspondence which passed between the Viceroy of New Spain and the home Government deserve special mention. In the latter collection are letters from Viceroy José de Iturrigaray to Don Pedro Cevallos, then Minister of State, which go a long way toward explaining the conduct of General James Wilkinson at the crisis on the Sabine in November, 1806. The cloudy transactions which resulted in the lamentable Neutral Ground Treaty and in the over-vaunted defeat of Burr are somewhat cleared of the mist which has enshrouded them.

The Mississippi Valley also proved a fruitful field for research. New Orleans was the focus for the various lines of forces which mingled in the conspiracy: it was the home of the Creoles who are supposed to have been at the heart of the plot; it was the place, if we follow generally accepted conclusions, specially designed by the adventurers for plunder; and it had the unenviable distinction to be subjected for two months to the tyranny of General Wilkinson. In its City Hall

are files of the *Moniteur de la Louisiane* and of the *Orleans Gazette*, both of which newspapers were published contemporaneously with the conspiracy. The former was the organ of the Creole population, the latter represented the Americans proper, while both contain, apart from valuable documentary evidence, a trustworthy reflection of the public mind of the time. It is needless to say that much new light is shed on that dark chapter in the history of the conspiracy which is concerned with the attitude of the native Louisianians toward Burr, and with Wilkinson's reign of terror in the capital of Orleans. The official manuscript Journal of W. C. C. Claiborne, the first Governor of the Territory, preserved in the old Tulane Law Library, is of exceeding interest, containing as it does much of his correspondence with the National Government, Wilkinson, and others.

Colonel R. T. Durrett of Louisville has in his splendid library a file of the *Palladium*, an independent newspaper published at Frankfort, Kentucky, and edited by William Hunter. In it are voiced the early controversies that rent Kentucky society, which has always been regarded as rife with disaffection. Most of the sensational articles concerning Burr, Wilkinson, and the Spanish Association, which appeared in the *Western World*, an incendiary newspaper established at Frankfort in July, 1806, were reprinted in the *Palladium*. Likewise a full account is given of the two arraignments of Burr in Kentucky. Another im-

portant source is the *Lexington Gazette*—a file of which is preserved in the Lexington Public Library—one of the most influential journals of the early West. Its columns, like those of the *Palladium*, were devoted to combating the inflammatory reports which appeared weekly in the *Western World*, and to asserting the patriotism of the frontiersmen.

The letters cited from the Andrew Jackson MSS. are of moment, for the relations which subsisted between Jackson and Burr have been so distorted and amplified that any approximation to the truth is to be welcomed. I am obliged to Messrs. Woodbury and Gist Blair for transcripts of the original documents.

The Henry Clay MSS. and the Breckenridge Letters were opened to my inspection, and it is a pleasure to express my gratitude to Thomas Clay, Esq., and to Colonel W. C. P. Breckenridge for their respective services in this connection.

The Jefferson and Madison MSS. have been examined with profit. Moreover, the Department of State at Washington, contains a notable volume entitled "Letters in Relation to Burr's Conspiracy," the contents of which, so far as I can ascertain, have never been made public. The letters are from various sources, and many of them are extremely significant, serving to make clearer the whole view of the conspiracy, especially the latter phase of it centering in the trial at Richmond.

That Burr was himself a mapmaker is known, but

that maps exhibiting the geography of his Western enterprise were in existence had hardly been suspected. There are, however, three such maps in the possession of Mrs. Thomas C. Wordin. They were inherited from her grandfather, Dr. John Cummins, who lived on the Bayou Pierre in Mississippi Territory where Burr's expedition collapsed. Dr. Cummins indorsed for Burr to a considerable extent, which proved his attachment;—and no doubt when the conspirator was under trial in the Territory these tell-tale documents were turned over to one who could be trusted to secrete them. The maps are of preëminent significance, illustrating, as they undoubtedly do, the outlines of Burr's project. To distinguish, Map No. 1 (measuring thirty-nine inches by thirty-two) shows the lower region of the Mississippi River with Natchez, New Orleans, and the Washita lands, also New Mexico and Mexico down to Yucatan. Map No. 2 is an admiralty chart (twenty-three inches by nineteen) and gives with astonishing minuteness a survey of the Gulf coast from New Orleans to Campeche. Islands, bars, and inlets are recorded, and soundings are given. The chart is beautifully executed on paper bearing the watermark of 1801. Map No. 3, which is here reproduced, measures in the original forty-five inches by nineteen. It exhibits in some of its details with startling correctness that section of Mexico lying between Vera Cruz on the east and Mexico City on the west. The minutiae into which these maps descend display a knowledge which could have been

obtained only from Spanish sources; and this opinion is reënforced by the fact that the longitude in one case is reckoned from Cadiz. On the whole, these documents, the authenticity of which is indubitable, form a strong link in the chain of evidence.

The correspondence of Anthony Merry, mentioned above, with whom Burr, while yet Vice-President, opened his intrigue, has been carefully examined. I had hoped also to find in the British Archives traces of Merry's correspondence with Burr in 1808, but my endeavors and the efforts of Mr. Hubert Hall of the Public Record Office were without result. Transcripts of Yrujo's correspondence with his home Government concerning Burr's disclosures to him have been deposited by Mr. Adams in the State Department Archives at Washington, and students ought to appreciate such a display of good will and scholarly spirit.

The reports of Merry and Yrujo reveal an astonishing audacity of design on the part of the conspirators. While they failed in their main purpose of obtaining needed moneys from King George and Don Carlos, they succeeded in hoodwinking both Merry and Yrujo. Here, as indicated above, there arises between Mr. Adams and myself a diversity of opinion which only serves to illustrate what different conclusions may be drawn from the same materials, taken in conjunction with additional facts. In this connection it is a pleasure to say that, while I have often had cause to disagree with Mr. Adams, he has been of inestimable service to

me not only because of his masterly method and the inspiration derived from following his work, but because he has said practically the last word on the conspiracy in its classic form, which teaches that it was double-natured—treasonable and filibustering.

Among those to whom I am under obligations and to whom I wish in this place to express my gratitude are: Señor Mariscal, Vice-President of the Republic of Mexico, and General Clayton, Ambassador to Mexico, through whose coöperation I was granted the freest access to the Mexican Archives; Mr. William Beer, librarian of the Howard Memorial Library of New Orleans; Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, who opened to me his rare collection of Western Americana; Dr. David J. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State; the Honorable Joseph H. Choate, Ambassador to the Court of St. James, whose note to the British Foreign Office so much facilitated my researches; Mr. Villiers of the Foreign Office, and Mr. Hubert Hall of the Public Record Office, whose uniform courtesy cannot be forgotten; and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Wordin through whose kindness the Burr maps are for the first time called to the notice of the public.

I have specially to acknowledge the services of Professor George P. Garrison, who first encouraged me in the prosecution of the work, and who kindly read the MS. Mr. John P. Weisenhagen, Dr. and Mrs. William B. Seeley, Professor Francis W. Shepardson, and Professor Frederick J. Turner have in more than

one way left me indebted to them. My hearty thanks are due to Professor J. Franklin Jameson for his critical reading of the MS. and for his suggestions. To Dr. Louis H. Gray and Mr. C. C. Whinery I am grateful for corrections made in the proof. I wish also to thank my publishers for their readiness to comply with suggestions and for their constant courtesy.

Lastly, if the book has any merit, it is largely due to Idéalie Marie McCaleb, whose interest in it sprang up under peculiar circumstances, whose labors on it were many-natured, and whose faith in it has never wavered.

WALTER FLAVIUS MCCALEB.

WASHINGTON SQUARE, March 25, 1903.



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# The Aaron Burr Conspiracy



## CHAPTER I.

### *A Brief Survey of the Period*



THE Conspiracy of Aaron Burr was preëminently a revolutionary product, receiving its inspiration from that unprecedented period of upheaval which began with the Revolution of 1776, its impelling force from the character of the American pioneer, its license from the disturbed condition of affairs existing in the New World. It is therefore necessary, in order correctly to view the movement, to devote a few words to a general survey of contemporaneous history, with especial regard to the West and the Spanish-American colonies.

America was in the Eighteenth Century, as now, inseparably bound up with Europe, the thought and feeling of the one instantly finding response in the other; so the flame of war for larger liberty, kindled first on the shores of America, was destined to lose itself in the vastness of the general conflagration. The doctrines set forth in the Declaration of Independence struck at the root of existing European institutions—

among which were privileged orders—and denied the divine right of kings. The phrase that all men are created equal lent overwhelming impetus to the oncoming French Revolution, and made possible the freedom of the wretched colonies of Spain in the Western World. The news of the rising in Europe thrilled the Thirteen Colonies which had been recently at war for their rights. The tricolor and the cockade became almost national emblems, while the mass of the people, whom the Constitution had sought in a measure to exclude from power, came to feel their weight in the affairs of the nation. In the Spanish-American provinces, because of the strenuous measures resorted to by the authorities, the force of the Revolution was much abated; but in spite of the Holy Inquisition the seditious doctrines of the French enthusiasts were disseminated among the natives.<sup>1</sup> Presently there were some who, brooding over the condition of their country, began to direct stirring pamphlets against the iniquities of the Spanish Government, and to plot for its disruption.<sup>2</sup> Summary and bloody were the proceedings of the authorities against the conspirators, but nothing could stay the spread of the maxims of liberty and equality set in motion by the great Revolution, although at the moment its crimes appalled the world.

If we examine into the internal conditions of the colonial establishments of Spain we shall see that everything was ripe for disunion and rebellion. A

<sup>1</sup>Alaman's *Historia de Mexico*, i., 127.

<sup>2</sup>Restrepo's *Historia de la Revolución de Nueva Granada*, i., 55.

writer in *Bell's Messenger*, an influential journal of the day, said that the Spanish Colonies supported the parent as Anchises of old was supported by his children; but that they had become tired of the weight and cared not how soon the burden was shuffled off. The condition of affairs in many parts was indeed deplorable, for the system of government which Spain bound upon her colonies was antiquated and ill adjusted to the progress and necessities of the time. Everywhere absolutism, in Church and State, pressed the superstitious natives from one stage of degradation to a lower. Almost three centuries of Spanish rule in the Americas passed before the gross injustices in the prevailing order of things appealed to men with a force not to be repressed. Once more the masses were arrayed against privileged classes, and the fury of the Mexicans with their pikes at Guanajuato was not unlike that of the "sans-culottes" which overturned the Bastille and inspired the Terror.

The United States, through social and commercial relations, knew of the insurrections in the Spanish Americas and watched the political situation with keen and lively interest. This was but natural, for sentimentalism and revolutionary intoxication completely possessed the American mind. It was a radical régime that bore Thomas Jefferson in triumph. Aristocracy was spurned; the oligarchy of our early national period was rudely cast off, while in its place was installed virile, confident democracy. The sympathy of the young Republic for the French people in their struggle against the tyranny of Europe was unquestioned; in-

deed, tyranny in any quarter excited them to reprobate the existence of kings.

It was in the West that this madness reached its height. The course of political events had told mightily in molding the character of the Westerners. Their nearest neighbors were the Spaniards in Louisiana, and these, through repressive laws and encroachments, had lost no opportunity to make life in the Mississippi Valley unendurable. The States lying to the east of the Alleghanies, the original Union, contributed much in a negative way to estrange the Western settlements by neglecting and ignoring their interests. When Spain confiscated property on the Mississippi the Westerners blazed with indignation; and yet Congress seriously considered a treaty which would have closed the Mississippi to their commerce for twenty-five years. Thus outraged, the pioneers expressed their feelings through outspoken petitions to the Assembly of Virginia and to Congress. Their rights, they declared, were considered but subsidies to be traded for commercial concessions to the East; they had no market for their corn and pork; their goods were appropriated; the Indians were sent against them: they would end the tyranny by expelling the enemy from Louisiana!

There followed from 1787 a decade full of confusion and intrigues. The most conspicuous movement was known as the Spanish Association, or Conspiracy, whose vital principle comprehended the incorporation of the West with the possessions of Spain. This, however, played an insignificant part in the course of events, for the people instinctively recoiled at the

thought of becoming subject to a nation and a civilization they loathed. In reality it has never been shown that the movement embraced more than a few politicians and pensioners of Spain, of whom James Wilkinson was the chief, not only in point of service, but in talents. The Spanish movement can not have had, from the nature of things, roots that went deep in society—the Westerners were bound to the States by unseverable ties of blood and tradition.

When France rose against England and Spain, she had the sympathies of the Americans, who were even ready to take up arms in her behalf. Indeed, so tremendous was the force brought to bear on the Government that President Washington hardly withstood it; even the devotion of the people to him seemed for a time irretrievably lost. At such a moment (1793) Genet, the French Minister, landed in America. Taking advantage of the tide of feeling he equipped privateers, harassed the Government and launched a project for the invasion of the Spanish Possessions from our Western States. Louisiana and the Floridas were to be taken and, perhaps, Mexico.<sup>1</sup> During the summer Genet pushed his Louisiana expedition, which was forming in the West under the leadership of George Rogers Clark. Upon receiving notice to the effect that two hundred and fifty men were actually collected in that quarter, Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, appealed to Governor Shelby of Kentucky for information. The Governor admitted the

<sup>1</sup>See Frederick J. Turner, in *American Historical Review*, July, 1898.

presence of French revolutionists, and that Clark had received a commission to equip an army which had for its object the clearing of the Mississippi of the Spaniards; but he said that he was powerless to interfere, inasmuch as every citizen had a right to leave the State, if he pleased, and to take with him arms and ammunition.

This survey of events is necessary to us if we are rightly to interpret the Aaron Burr Conspiracy. It is only by studying the character of the people, the conditions under which they lived, and the nature of their environment that we can comprehend their feelings and their actions. But why should the West have been eager to wage a war against a neighboring power? Ostensibly it was a movement concerted with France against the enemies of humanity and liberty. There was still alive in the wilds of the New World something of the sentimentalism which had animated the best period of the great Revolution; and some of it, indeed, was destined to remain in the American breast to find its fruition in a struggle for the freedom of Cuba, which had felt for four centuries the leaden weight of mediævalism. But sympathy for the oppressed is too often associated with—indeed, too often conceals—an instinct which rises anew with every generation of Anglo-Saxons. In the mind of the Westerners, close-linked with their hatred of Spain for her insolence on the one hand and her oppression on the other, came the longing for her fabulous riches, which they meant sooner or later to take for themselves.

When the patience of the trans-Alleghany settlers



had been well-nigh outworn, Jay's Treaty, coupled with the victories of "Mad Anthony" Wayne over the Indians, brought relief to the Northwest, while the treaty which Pinckney negotiated at Madrid (1795) pacified the South and West. Spain at last recognized the claim of the United States to the free navigation of the Mississippi and granted under certain conditions the right of depositing goods in New Orleans. This dropping of the bars to commercial expansion proved a great stimulus to emigration; and by the end of the century the Westerners, numbering 400,000 souls, were scattered along the Great Lakes, were gazing across the Mississippi, and were crowding the boundary lines of the Floridas. Indeed, no longer were boundaries sufficient to stay their progress—many pushed into Missouri and Louisiana; but for the present the goal toward which all eyes were turned was the possession of New Orleans and the Mississippi.

"At the beginning of the nineteenth century," says Roosevelt,<sup>1</sup> "the settlers on the Western waters recognized in Spain their natural enemy, because she was the power which held the South and the west bank of the Mississippi. They would have transferred their hostility to any other power which fell heir to her possessions, for these possessions they were bound one day to make their own."

Such an opinion was shared in Europe. The French Ambassador, writing to his home Government from Madrid, said:<sup>2</sup>—

<sup>1</sup>Roosevelt's *Winning of the West*, iv., 254.

<sup>2</sup>*American State Papers*, x., 185.

"The Cabinet of Madrid thinks it has the greatest interests not to open the Mississippi to the Americans, and to disgust them from making establishments on that river, as they would not delay to possess themselves of the commerce of New Orleans and Mexico, whatever impediments should be opposed to their progress, and that they would become neighbors the more dangerous to Spain—as, even in their present weakness, they conceive vast projects for the conquest of the western shore of the Mississippi."

With the opening of the Nineteenth Century the grievances against Spain took a new form. Although the Mississippi had been thrown open to the commerce of the Americans they were forbidden to enter the Spanish domain on pain of arrest and imprisonment, or even death. The traders among the Indians were apprehended, their goods confiscated, and border troubles—for example the Kemper brothers episode in West Florida—assumed in several cases serious complications. But the mine was laid on October 16, 1802, when Juan Ventura Morales, the Spanish Intendant of Louisiana, proclaimed that the right of depositing goods in New Orleans had been forfeited by the Americans. The whole country was aroused; war for the vindication of rights was everywhere proclaimed; and it is not surprising that strong measures were contemplated against the arrogant foreigners. The Americans looked upon the right of deposit as one which could not be withdrawn; but the protests of the Governor of Louisiana and the Secretary of War at Washington were ineffectual. In the end the action was disavowed by Spain, but nothing could stay the storm which had been raised. Henry Clay of Kentucky did not exaggerate

when he declared that: "The whole country was in commotion and, at the nod of the Government, would have fallen on Baton Rouge and New Orleans, and punished the treachery of the perfidious Government."<sup>1</sup> In many quarters it was openly advocated that the West should appeal to arms. "Coriolanus" said in the *Morning Chronicle*, December 27, 1802: "Kentucky has the advantage of invasion; and she no doubt will use it, if unsupported by the Union; she moves alone to the combat; she is situated on the waters rapidly descending to the point of attack; she will overwhelm Orleans and West Florida with promptitude and ease."<sup>2</sup>

Amidst this general clamor came the startling report of the transfer of Louisiana to Napoleon. The South joined the West in declaring that France should not be allowed to establish herself in her old possession. Nor was Jefferson so deaf as to mistake the ring of earnestness in the voice of his constituency—his stronghold was in the South and West. He wrote in his message to Congress, October 17, 1803: "Previously, however, to this period we have not been unaware of the danger to which our peace would be perpetually exposed, whilst so important a key to the command of the western country remained under foreign power." At the crisis, he said that if France persisted in her course to reoccupy Louisiana the United States would, of necessity, be forced to marry the army and navy of England. He wished not for war; yet he saw that it

<sup>1</sup>Prentice's *Life of Henry Clay*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>*Palladium* (Frankfort, Kentucky), September 18, 1806.

was unavoidable if Louisiana was not secured to the Union, so he sought to purchase the coveted land.

In 1762 France ceded to Spain a region of unknown extent lying in the main to the west of the Mississippi; this territory was known as Louisiana, having been named in honor of the great Louis. But now that France again led the nations and was dominated by such a man as Bonaparte the retrocession was sought, and on October 1, 1800, with the secret treaty of San Ildefonso the act was concluded. Without entering into details, it is enough to state that the rupture of the Peace of Amiens, with its immediate consequences, caused Napoleon to meet the United States half way—and Louisiana was sold.

Hardly had the report of its acquisition become public when the question as to limits arose. Indeed, the United States commissioners, Monroe and Livingston, were engaged over this before the papers were signed. France held that the United States was entitled *only* to the land known as Louisiana, which was transferred to Spain in 1762 and which was retroceded to France by Spain in the Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1800. The United States was entitled to so much, but what were the boundaries? How far did Louisiana extend to the east? To the Iberville or to the Perdido? And was the western limit marked by the Arroyo Hondo, the Sabine, or the Rio Grande?

The question of limits, however, did not at first disturb the minds of the Westerners. The cession created great rejoicing throughout the region directly affected; meetings were held and resolutions passed,

while governors thought it of enough importance to mention in their messages. Governor Greenup told in grandiloquent words what it meant for Kentucky and for the West, closing his remarks with a peroration on America as the home of freedom.<sup>1</sup> Quite different was the attitude of New England, where the purchase was held up to the grossest ridicule. To the men who opened the way for the march of empire it meant everything. No longer would their flatboats be levied upon by Spain for floating on the Father of Waters; no longer would they be barred from the markets because of excessive duties; no longer would their material growth be hampered by a foreign power;—there were new regions to occupy, richer lands to develop and unbounded freedom of action! Now indeed the Westerners rejoiced in the strong arm of the Government. They had more than they had dared to expect, and their enthusiasm for Jefferson and the national Government, to whom all was attributed, was unlimited.

The acquisition of Louisiana settled finally the question of the navigation of the Mississippi; but the boundary dispute, complicated by the "French Spoliation Claims," which had their origin in French depredations on American commerce, promised no solution short of the sword. In the West, in truth, the sword was ready at any moment to leap from the scabbard. If the backwoodsman desired to move into new lands in search of game or to barter with the natives, he resented the law which forbade his approach. No inhabitant of Louisiana, so the royal order read, was to be permitted

<sup>1</sup>*Palladium*, November 10, 1804.

to enter Nueva España,<sup>1</sup> for he had but one object in view—to strike a blow at Spain. The primary purpose of any expedition was to corrupt his Majesty's allies, the Indians, or to study the geography for military purposes. Nemecio Salcedo, Captain-General of the Internal Provinces of Mexico, went to such an extreme that he complained to the Viceroy, in October, 1805, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, saying that it went ostensibly to discover the source of the Missouri, but really to estrange the Indians.<sup>2</sup> The Viceroy of Mexico sent reinforcements to the Sabine River to protect the frontier, and agents among the natives of Texas. Presents were distributed among them, for, as the Spaniards wrote, Dr. Sibley, the Indian agent of the Americans, had tried to seduce them from their allegiance. Jefferson, also in expectation of war, instructed Sibley to spare no means to convince the Red Men "of the justice and liberality we are determined to use towards them, and to attach them to us indissolubly."<sup>3</sup>

Beside the bitter hatred of Spain there had sprung into vigorous life in the West a national consciousness, a national mind, which resented the insults of the powers and which was destined to preserve the Union in the second war with Great Britain. Indeed, in a sense, love for the Constitution meant detestation of Spain. The conflict with the wilderness and its inhabitants, the free air, and freedom from restrictions, had

<sup>1</sup>Salcedo to Cordero, January 9, 1804; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Salcedo to Iturrigaray, October 2, 1805; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Jefferson to Dr. Sibley, May 27, 1805; Jefferson's (Washington, ed.) *Works*, iv., 580.

caused the Westerners to recoil at the thought of Spanish tyranny and had, under the stimulus of their predilections, converted them unwittingly into revolutionists; and thus for years the West harbored the most devoted adherents of the Constitution and the most unscrupulous filibusters. They had a contempt for Spanish institutions, civil and religious, and were filled with "painful solicitude for the unfortunate millions she held in bondage." They indulged, said Foote in his *History of Texas*, "a jealousy active and unremitting towards the Spanish Government and people on account of the power which they possessed of disturbing the peace and retarding the growth of the United States." To contempt and jealousy were added the sense of injustice done us in the Napoleonic wars and the question of the settlement of boundaries. Most Westerners thought West Florida and Texas ours by right of purchase and were eager to seize them. The Bishop of Nueva León, who visited Natchitoches in January, 1805, wrote<sup>1</sup> to Viceroy Iturrigaray that "these Republicans count themselves owners of the territory to the Rio Grande." There were many, too, who endorsed what Jefferson suggested in a letter to A. Stewart in 1785 concerning the disposition of the Spanish possessions, that it was best for the interests of the great continent not to press too soon upon the Spaniards; but they believed the time was now come "to gain it from them piece by piece."

It was this the Spaniards feared; they had an in-

<sup>1</sup>Bishop of Nueva León to Iturrigaray, January 20, 1805; MSS. Mexican Archives.

herent dread of the approach of the Americans, who were looked upon as being by blood and tradition lawless terrorists and revolutionists. Nor has the history of Spain in America during the Nineteenth Century tended, in their view, to disprove the correctness of the belief. One of the reasons which brought Spain to consent to the transfer of Louisiana to France was the hope that it would be made a buffer between the American and her own possessions. But its acquisition by the United States reopened the fears and difficulties of her neighbor. Louisiana became henceforth, as de Onís, the noted minister to this country, wrote,<sup>1</sup> a gateway for adventurers into Mexico.

On the Continent, so far as our study is concerned, the supremacy of French influence in the determinations of the Spanish Court was of paramount importance. It made possible the peaceful acquisition of Louisiana and restrained the United States from going to war with Spain during the years immediately succeeding; for war with Spain meant war with France also. But for this, Mexico and other Spanish-American colonies would have been earlier revolutionized. Napoleon desired to bring into his world-wide empire these boundless possessions; therefore France stood as a barrier between the two disputants. The wars that raged on the Continent had interest for us only in so far as they were waged, or were supposed to be waged, on the basis of humanitarian principles—the rights of the people as opposed to absolutism. This was the sign which roused the American people and which, in spite

<sup>1</sup>De Onís's *Cuestión de Texas*, p. 3.



of Napoleon's unwise and unwarranted attacks on our commerce, kept the masses steadfastly in sympathy with France in her struggles. The case might have been modified somewhat had England acted another rôle; but so uncompromising and bitter was her resentment and her memory of the War of the Revolution that she disregarded at will our interests and insulted whenever she chose our national dignity. With Europe at war, America struggled hard to preserve her neutrality, and in accomplishing this she became the prey of both France and England, while suffering outrage after outrage from a power she longed to grind under her heel.

It was at such a juncture as this—the Americas in a state of unrest and revolution, Europe embroiled in the deadly and terrible struggles of Pitt and Napoleon, and the United States threatening war with Spain—that the first term of Jefferson's administration came to an end, and Aaron Burr, indicted for the slaying of Hamilton, eschewed by the Republicans and hounded by the Federalists, stepped down from the office of Vice-President. He had already embarked in an enterprise simple enough in itself, but which, through the tangling of his own web and the interplay of circumstances over which he had no control, was destined to become a puzzle for succeeding generations.

## CHAPTER II.

### *Burr's Tour of the West*



AT THE time when he embarked in his conspiracy Aaron Burr was forty-nine years of age. He owned a distinguished ancestry; Jonathan Edwards, the foremost theologian of America, was his grandfather on his mother's side, while the Burrs were of noble German blood, Aaron's father being a noted divine and president of Princeton College. The misfortunes of Burr began early; his parents died, leaving him and an only sister at a tender age to the care of relatives. He was carefully prepared for college and at sixteen was graduated with distinction from Princeton. He was destined for the ministry, but a few months' study of theology under Dr. Bellamy seems to have confirmed him in skepticism. He determined to take up the law, and began its study under Tappan Reeve, his brother-in-law. But the news of the battle of Lexington startled him from this for the time being. Hurrying to Boston Burr took his place in the ranks, and later joined Arnold's expedition to Quebec, nothing deterred by the perils of snow and ice and the pleadings of his relatives. He won distinction in the campaign and had the melancholy honor of bearing away the dead body of General Montgomery from before the snowbound blockhouse whence recoiled the last serious assault on the capital of Canada. Burr's rise was rapid; his integrity, bravery, intelligence, and

withal his knowledge of military science recommended him to his superiors. From an aide-de-camp to General Putnam he was soon elevated to the command of a regiment, acquitting himself notably while in charge of the Westchester lines above New York City.

After four years of unremitting service, Burr resigned from the army and at once bent his energies to the law, and within a short space was admitted to practice. He opened an office in Albany and was soon after married to Theodosia Prevost, an attractive and intellectual widow. To them was born a daughter, Theodosia, who was to play a brilliant and tragic rôle. Burr resided at Albany until the British were withdrawn from New York, when he moved thither and began the practice of his profession in earnest, mounting rapidly in the esteem of the public and dividing honors with Alexander Hamilton.

Burr's entry into politics seems to have been more by accident than design. In the beginning he steered clear of an alliance with either of the three great families—the Clintons, Livingstons, and Schuylers—creating for himself an independent party, the nucleus of which was a group of enthusiastic young men whom Hamilton denominated Burr's myrmidons. As yet things went smoothly for Burr who was, in 1789, after having opposed the reelection of George Clinton to the governorship, appointed by him Attorney-General of the State. In this capacity he won recognition both as an orator and as an administrator. Two years later, to his surprise, so far as we know, he was elected to the Senate of the United States over the head of General

Schuyler, Hamilton's father-in-law. This was the beginning of the feud which closed with the dark, lamentable tragedy of Weehawken—the duel in which Hamilton was slain.

The career of Burr in the Senate, where he espoused the Republican cause, was eminently honorable. He at once strode toward the leadership of the party, and in the Presidential election of 1796 received thirty electoral votes. At the end of his term of office, retired as Senator, he entered upon the maelstrom of New York politics. New York was in the election of 1800, as it has been so often since, the pivotal State, the determining factor in the national election. Through Burr's agency the Clintons and Livingstons were united, the schisms in the ranks of the opposition were widened, and the commonwealth was swept by the Republican electors. Burr was rightly credited with the victory, and was obviously the logical candidate for the Vice-Presidency, for which place he was nominated by the Congressional caucus which named Jefferson for the highest honor.

When the votes of the Electoral College were polled it was found that Jefferson and Burr had each seventy-three; John Adams sixty-five; Pinckney sixty-four; Jay one. There being a tie, the election was accordingly thrown into the House of Representatives, where it resolved itself into a struggle between the Federalists and the Republicans. After weary days of balloting and much bitterness Jefferson was made President, Burr becoming Vice-President. Now indeed storms began to gather. He came to be regarded by the Clin-

tons and Livingstons as an interloper. The party once victorious, he was discovered to be in the path of several aspiring gentlemen, who left no means untouched for his undoing. Attacked viciously by Cheetham, the scurrilous editor of the *American Citizen*, the organ of De Witt Clinton, he became also an object of suspicion and envy in the eyes of Jefferson and the Virginia political clique. Some of his assailants were only too glad to drag from the cesspool of political scandals any fragment which might be available in besmirching his character. He was accused of this and that, through all of which he maintained a resolute silence. It was a characteristic of his never to refute charges against his name. Losing caste with Jefferson and the leaders of his party, he stood for the governorship of New York; but he was doomed, and defeat led further—to annihilation of his hopes for political preferment.

Alexander Hamilton, who had pursued him with relentless language and bitter, damaging charges, was challenged to a duel and slain as a direct outcome of the part he had played in the election. If anything was now lacking to make Burr's isolation complete it was his stepping down from the chair of the Senate. Cast out by the Republicans, he was scorned and persecuted by the Federalists. As a party leader he was dead. Brilliant, ambitious, he must now have been in a state of mind bordering on despair, had he been addicted to gloom and melancholy. But it is not shown that Burr ever lamented or grieved over the course of things, however severely and painfully it pressed upon him. He had still his myrmidons who were as devoted to their

leader as they had been under the flush of his startling successes. Driven from power in the States, he turned with enthusiasm to a plan he had early formed of revolutionizing the Spanish colonies.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, before his term of office had expired, he was busy evolving ways and means which were to contribute to its success. As early as August 6, 1804, he had begun through an intermediary his intrigue with Anthony Merry, British Minister to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

A few days after the oath of office had been administered to his successor, George Clinton, Burr, still animated with the applause his last words in the Senate had occasioned, left Washington on a tour of the West—a preliminary to the inauguration of his project. He reached Philadelphia March 21, 1805, where he planned to spend ten days before continuing his journey. There he met Merry, to whom he now laid open his deceptive project, which he hoped would wring from the British treasury a sum of money commensurate with his needs. Mr. Merry, in a cipher letter of March 29th, gave Lord Harrowby the details:<sup>3</sup>—

“Notwithstanding the known profligacy of Mr. Burr’s character I am encouraged to report to your Lordship the substance of some secret communications which he has sought to make to me since he has been out of office. . . . Mr. Burr (with whom I know that the deputies became very intimate during their residence here) has

<sup>1</sup>Davis’s *Memoirs of Aaron Burr*, ii., 376.

<sup>2</sup>The text of this correspondence of Merry was disallowed by the British Foreign Office.

<sup>3</sup>Merry to Lord Harrowby, March 29, 1805; MSS. British Archives.

mentioned to me that the inhabitants of Louisiana seem determined to render themselves independent of the United States and that the execution of their design is only delayed by the difficulty of obtaining previously an assurance of protection and assistance from some foreign power and of concerting and connecting their independence with that of the inhabitants of the Western parts of the United States, who must always have a command over them by the rivers which communicate with the Mississippi. It is clear that Mr. Burr (although he has not as yet confided to me the exact nature and extent of his plan) means to endeavor to be the instrument for effecting such a connection. He has told me that the inhabitants of Louisiana, notwithstanding that they are almost all of French or Spanish origin, as well as those of the Western part of the United States, would, for many obvious reasons, prefer having the protection and assistance of Great Britain to the support of France; but that if his Majesty's government should not think proper to listen to his overture, application will be made to that of France, who will, he had reason to know, be eager to attend to it in the most effectual manner, observing that peace in Europe would accelerate the event in question by affording to the French more easy means of communication with the continent of America, though, even while at war with England, they might always find those of sending the small force that would be required for the purpose in question. He pointed out the great commercial advantage which his Majesty's dominions in general would derive from furnishing almost exclusively (as they might through Canada and New Orleans) the inhabitants of so extensive a territory."

A masterly argument and impressively put. It was a luring bait, and Merry took it at once for what it seemed—forwarding it to his Government with as much approbation as he dared and with as much expedition as he could command. If the commercial classes of England were determined to annihilate American

trade, if King George was set upon insulting the young nation as part of his daily routine, the idea of dividing the house against itself seemed to Merry not only inviting, but most wise and diplomatic. And furthermore, should England reject the offer, France might seize the occasion to deal the commercial and political interests of her enemy a telling blow. The proposition was inviting. Thus far the ex-Vice-President had dealt only in generalities—he had discussed what was the common talk of the day concerning the infidelity of Louisiana and its determination to revolt. When pressed for something more tangible, Burr simply made excuses, giving out only as much as he deemed necessary to secure “the protection and assurance required to accomplish the object.” Merry continued:

“Mr. Burr observed that it would be too dangerous and even premature to disclose to me at present the full extent and detail of the plan he had formed; but that he was at the same time aware of the necessity of making the most ample and unreserved communication to his Majesty’s government, in order that they might be fully satisfied, as well of the good faith with which he means to act, as of the practicability and utility to them of the undertaking which he had in view and that he would therefore send a confidential person to England to make those communications as soon as he should have received through me, the necessary assurance of their being disposed to grant the protection and assurance required to accomplish the object.”

The hollowness of Burr’s intrigue, the barefacedness of the sharp scheme to secure funds for the floating of his designs on Mexico by holding out hopes



to Merry which he knew had not the slightest chance of realization, did not appear at the moment, but could not have been more boldly proclaimed than in his statement of the "protection and assurance required":

"In regard to the military aid, he said, two or three frigates and the same number of smaller vessels to be stationed at the mouth of the Mississippi to prevent its being blockaded by such force as the United States could send, and to keep open the communications with the sea would be the whole that would be wanted; and in respect to money the loan of about one hundred thousand pounds would, he conceived, be sufficient for the immediate purposes of the enterprise, although it was impossible for him to speak at present with accuracy as to this matter. On the latter allegation he observed that any suspicion of his Majesty's government being concerned in the transaction, till after their independence should have been declared, which would arise if remittances were made to this country or if bills were drawn from hence, might be avoided by the appropriation to this object of a proportion of the two hundred thousand pounds which the United States have to pay to his Majesty next July, and part of which sum he would devise the means to get into his possession without its destination being either known or suspected."

Already the matter of money was worrying Burr and his chief associates. This most necessary article in the inauguration of any project was their first consideration, and, that it might be obtained, no device however questionable or nefarious was to be ignored if success were promised—the end would justify the means. The matter of the two or three frigates at the mouth of the Mississippi was as nothing in the scales with a hundred thousand pounds, which were conceived

to be sufficient for the "immediate purposes of the enterprise."

After the interview with Merry, Burr quickly made his preparations for his journey over the mountains to Pittsburg. He advised his daughter to address him for the time being at Cincinnati, in care of John Smith, Senator from Ohio, adding that the object of his journey, "not mere curiosity or *pour passer le temps*," might take him to New Orleans and perhaps farther. It is quite probable that Burr planned a continuation of his voyage of discovery to Mexico. Certain it is that he alarmed Casa Yrujo—the Spanish Minister who was proving such a plague to Jefferson—before leaving Washington by sending twice to him for a passport to Mexico, "under the pretext that the death of General Hamilton (whom he killed out of spite) would not permit his remaining in the United States." Yrujo knew of Burr's interviews with Merry, and therefore thought the object of Burr's visit most suspicious—in a word, he believed him the spy of England. He reported that Burr had taken with him mathematical instruments for the purpose of making plans, and that the officials of the Floridas had been warned against his manœuvres.<sup>1</sup> But Yrujo had not penetrated Burr's designs; little dreamed that his purpose was to place himself in touch with the revolutionists of Mexico, who were so shortly to smite the power of Spain.

On April 29, 1805, Burr reached Pittsburg on the Ohio, where General James Wilkinson, who had just been appointed Governor of the newly organized Terri-

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, May 24, 1805; MSS. Spanish Archives.

tory of Louisiana, was to have joined him. But Wilkinson had been delayed; so, leaving a letter for him, Burr embarked upon the Ohio in an ark which he had had specially prepared for him. In due time he reached Marietta, a hamlet of eighty houses, where he parted company with Mathew Lyon, member of Congress from Tennessee, whom he had overtaken *en route* and with whom it seems the matter of Burr's return to Congress from that State was discussed. Putting off the next day he passed Parkersburg, and two miles below arrived at Blennerhassett's Island, which has become famous through its connection with the conspiracy. Its three hundred acres have been much reduced by the encroachment of the river, but the narrowing shores, where Harman Blennerhassett, an Irish gentleman, had planted fields of hemp and had erected palatial buildings, are still haunted with the memory of a tragedy. The master was absent, but Mrs. Blennerhassett invited the ex-Vice-President to dinner—and this was the beginning of a connection which was to link forever the names of Burr and Blennerhassett.

On the eleventh of May Burr reached Cincinnati, then a town of fifteen hundred inhabitants, where he became the guest of Senator John Smith, who was also a storekeeper and army contractor. There he met Jonathan Dayton, a friend from Revolutionary times, whose term as Senator from New Jersey had just expired. Burr spent a day in the company of Smith and Dayton, who were allied with him in the formulation of plans for the project. Hurrying down the river he next stopped at Louisville, whence he took

horse to Frankfort, which place was reached May 20th. Passing through Lexington, the 29th found him at Nashville, where he was four days the guest of Andrew Jackson and the recipient of unusual attentions. He was no longer the despised murderer of Hamilton, but the triumphant duelist; no longer the insidious, unscrupulous intriguer, but the general who had led the cohorts of Democracy to victory; and, finally, he was accepted as the predestined leader who was to scourge the Spaniards from America. This was, after all, the mission of his life. Such was Burr's announcement, and the news spread as fast as such welcome tidings might travel. To the Tennesseans and the frontiersmen in general it was a battle-call they were only too eager to answer; and among the first to respond was Andrew Jackson, major-general of the Tennessee militia.

On June 3d Burr was provided by his host with an open boat, in which he floated to the mouth of the Cumberland River, a distance of two hundred and thirty miles, where his ark, which had come down the Ohio, was in waiting. The next stop was made sixteen miles down the Ohio at Fort Massac—a prominent frontier post on the north bank of the river not many miles from its juncture with the Mississippi—where General Wilkinson had arrived, having descended the river from Pittsburg in the wake of Burr. The General had halted also in Cincinnati, keeping company with Smith and Dayton, who were represented as busy with a scheme to dig a canal around the falls of the Ohio. He found time, however, to write to John Adair, an

influential Kentuckian soon to succeed John Breckenridge in the Senate: "I was to have introduced my friend Burr to you; but in this I failed by accident. He understands your merits, and reckons on you. Prepare to visit me, and I will tell you all. We must have a peep at the unknown world beyond me." This letter perhaps affords a clue to the topic discussed by the General and his friends during the four days spent at Massac. No doubt the whole situation was canvassed: the probability of war with Spain; the ease with which the Floridas might be overrun; the matter of the equipping of an army which should sail for Vera Cruz to light the torch of insurrection in Mexico. Wilkinson afterward averred that the subjects of their conferences were legitimate. Whatever they were, the two old army friends, who had stood side by side under the walls of Quebec, parted with high hopes, Wilkinson making his way slowly to St. Louis, while Burr set out in a barge fitted up by the general with sails and colors, and manned by ten soldiers and a sergeant. In his pocket was a letter to Daniel Clark, a prominent merchant and influential citizen of New Orleans:

"This will be delivered to you by Colonel Burr," began the general's introductory note,<sup>1</sup> "whose worth you know well how to estimate. If the persecutions of a great and honorable man, can give title to generous attentions, he has claims to all your civilities, and all your services. You cannot oblige me more than by such conduct; and I pledge my life to you, it will not be misapplied. To him I refer you for many things improper to letter, and which he will not say to any other."

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. lxxi.

While Burr, thus equipped, passed on toward New Orleans, Wilkinson approached Majors Bruff and Hunt of the garrison of St. Louis, Timothy Kibby, John McKee, and others with propositions varying from the conquest of Mexico to the establishment of a military empire in Louisiana as a consequence of anarchy in the Eastern States, growing out of the rule of Democracy. Wilkinson had already begun sowing the seeds which were to prove the destruction of Burr. On June 24th instructions were written for Lieutenant Pike, who went, according to Kibby and Adair, to explore the way to Santa Fé and the mines of Mexico.

On June 25, 1805, Burr landed at New Orleans. The *Orleans Gazette* chronicled at the time: "Colonel Aaron Burr, late Vice-President of the United States, arrived here on Wednesday last in a boat displaying the American ensign, and rowed by a detachment of soldiers. We understand he purposes returning to Kentucky in ten or twelve days." Burr was much pleased with the city, and wrote Theodosia that he should certainly settle there were it not for herself and her boy, who controlled his fate. New Orleans was a place of no mean importance; during the course of a year three hundred sea-going vessels and six thousand river flat-boats arrived at its levees, and nine thousand people busied themselves within its limits. The letter to Clark was presented, and at an early date he gave a dinner in Burr's honor, which was attended by the best element in the city. Other fêtes followed, and Burr was everywhere received with the utmost cordiality.

The society most frequented by Burr has been, and in all probability will remain, a source of dispute.<sup>1</sup> There is no conclusive evidence to show that Burr restricted his confidences while in New Orleans to any individual or group of individuals. It appears from the light we have that Burr's purpose was to observe the drift of public opinion; to engage the warlike and the adventurous in his filibustering enterprise against the Spanish possessions. In this he was most successful; the Mexican Association, formed for the avowed purpose of collecting Mexican data which would be useful for the United States in case of war with Spain, was enlisted in his cause. Two of the most influential members of the Association were John Watkins, Mayor of New Orleans, and James Workman, judge of the county court. The former related to W. C. C. Claiborne, Governor of the Territory of

<sup>1</sup>Henry Adams says that Burr was "entertained by the enemies of Governor Claiborne and of the Spaniards" (*History of the United States*, iii., 223); that Wilkinson told the story, on the evidence of Lieutenant Spence, that "Burr on his arrival in Louisiana became acquainted with the so-called Mexican Association—a body of some three hundred men, leagued together for the emancipation of Mexico from the Spanish rule, . . . and under his influence the scheme of disunion was made a part of the Mexican plan." A moment later we are assured by the same eminent authority that Burr did not conceal his secrets from his "principal allies—the Creoles of New Orleans" (iii., 227). In other words, Mr. Adams contends—for the Mexican Association was composed of Americans—that practically the whole city, rent with factions, was in the secret which embraced the idea of a separation of the States and the conquest of Mexico, and yet all was harmonious.

Another writer of repute, Charles Gayarré, has averred (*History of Louisiana*, iii., 81) that Burr fell in with the Spaniards and gave them some intimation of his business. Gayarré never gave up this idea, for he interpreted the movement of the Spanish troops toward Baton Rouge at the moment of the crisis of the conspiracy as a diversion in Burr's behalf.

Orleans, at the crisis the history of the organization, repudiating in the most emphatic terms the charge of Wilkinson that its members were rabid disunionists. Watkins proved what he averred; even Claiborne when the storm had subsided, though he removed Watkins from the mayoralty, was obliged to confess to Madison, "I believe he meditated nothing against the American Government—and that he sincerely loves his country. I however am of opinion that his zeal for the liberation of Mexico led him into some imprudences."<sup>1</sup> Workman's interest in the cause of the Spanish colonies was not extinguished by the collapse of Burr's scheme, Erick Bollman, who was one of the prime movers in the Conspiracy, being able to write in 1808, "Judge Workman, now practising as a lawyer, is the only man of energy, which is constantly excited in the old cause. His looks are steadfastly turned to the South."<sup>2</sup>

Plans for the "liberation of Mexico" were formed beyond doubt. Emissaries were to be employed. The Bishop of New Orleans, who had traveled in Mexico and knew the discontent of the masses and the clergy, was in the secret, and designated three Jesuits to act as agents for the revolutionists. Madame Xavier Tarjcon, superior of the convent of Ursuline nuns at New Orleans, was also acquainted with the plot.<sup>3</sup> The paramount idea of the time was the revolutionizing of the Spanish territories—and Burr announced here, as he

<sup>1</sup>Claiborne to Madison, March 11, 1807; Letters in Relation to Burr's Conspiracy, MSS. State Department Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Bollman to Burr, August 11, 1808; *Private Journal of Aaron Burr* i., 29.

<sup>3</sup>Davis's *Memoirs of Aaron Burr*, ii., 382.



had done in Kentucky and Tennessee, that his life should be devoted to the overthrowing of the Spanish power in America.

Clark probably knew as much as any one of what was in contemplation, and his attitude of friendliness toward Burr at a later period, when he had every motive to pursue a different course, with his outspoken condemnation of Wilkinson in his *Proofs*,<sup>1</sup> shows that one of his attributes was love of justice. Gayarré more than established the correctness of the *Proofs*, which exposed Wilkinson's corrupt dealings with the Spaniards; and if Clark never fully divulged his knowledge of Burr's project, he betrayed the secret of it when he declared on the floor of Congress, at the moment when expectation was at its highest tension, that if treason were contemplated no Louisianian would be found concerned in it! Clark himself entertained revolutionary ideas, but they did not involve the sundering of the States. John Graham, Secretary of the Territory of Orleans, said that Clark had given him some papers which told, among other things, of the strength of the Mexican forces and garrisoned towns between Vera Cruz and the City of Mexico, and of the naval strength of Vera Cruz. It was Clark's opinion that Mexico could be easily invaded, but he would have nothing to do with such an undertaking if headed by the Government. Permission was all that was wanted—an empire could then be established.<sup>2</sup> This information had been

<sup>1</sup>Clark's *Proofs of the Corruption of General James Wilkinson*.

<sup>2</sup>Clark's *Proofs*, p. 103.

acquired while on trading voyages to the chief seaport of Mexico. Of these voyages there are frequent accounts in the Spanish official reports,<sup>1</sup> for Clark was wont to recite to Government the news of Europe and America. But an end came to this when the Spaniards learned that he had been chosen a Delegate to Congress.<sup>2</sup> Burr no doubt profited by what Clark had learned of the conditions of society in Mexico, and the merchant was observer enough to note that a revolution was imminent. That he agreed to join with Burr there is little doubt; but he, like many others, wished to see the movement triumphant before sharing its fortunes. Certain it is Clark never set out to play a heavy part in the plot, which, as he understood it, was wholly against Mexico. It was a matter for jest with him when he heard on the streets of New Orleans the extravagant designs attributed to his new acquaintance, whose address even was unknown to him. September 7th, a few weeks after the departure of Burr from New Orleans and almost at the hour of his arrival in St. Louis on his visit to Wilkinson, Clark wrote to the General:<sup>3</sup>—

“Many absurd and wild reports are circulated here, and have reached the ears of the officers of the late Spanish Government, respecting our ex-Vice-President. . . . You are spoken of as his right-hand man. *Entre nous*, I believe that Minor of Natchez has had a great part in this business, in order to make himself of importance—he is in the pay of Spain and wishes to convince

<sup>1</sup>Clark to Pedro de Alamo, September 26, 1805; MSS. Mexican Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Iturrigaray to Soler, August 27, 1806; MSS. Mexican Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. xxxiii.

them that he is much their friend. . . . What in the name of Heaven could give rise to these extravagances? Were I sufficiently intimate with Mr. Burr, and knew where to direct a line to him, I should take the liberty of writing to him. . . . The tale is a horrid one, if well told. Kentucky, Tennessee, the State of Ohio, with part of Georgia and part of Carolina, are to be bribed with the plunder of the Spanish countries west of us to separate from the Union; this is but a part of the business. Heaven, what wonderful doings there will be in those days! . . . Amuse Mr. Burr with an account of it."

Burr was pleased with the aspect of affairs in Louisiana and wrote his daughter that he had promised to return the next fall. Having spent a fortnight in New Orleans, where he had attached to his interests the Mexican Association, the adventurers, and the revolutionary element, Burr, mounted on horses provided by Clark, set out on his return overland. His first stop was at Natchez, where a week was spent among those who were eager to engage in a war with Spain, to punish the so-called invaders of the country. From Natchez he proceeded to Nashville, hazarding four hundred and fifty miles of wilderness. On August 6th he was again domiciled with Jackson, who was, as Burr described him at the time, a man of intelligence and a prompt, frank, ardent soul. A public dinner was now spread in Burr's honor at the capital, where toasts were drunk of a nature to leave no doubt as to the sympathies of the audience. Then he passed to Lexington, where he was the recipient of hospitalities such as only Southerners of that day knew how to dispense. The last day of August Burr was riding the twenty-two miles from Lexington to Frank-

fort, where he was once more quartered with John Brown, a distinguished citizen who had for years been a prominent figure in Kentucky politics. On September 2d Burr was in Louisville; ten days later he reached St. Louis on a visit to General Wilkinson, who had already assumed the reins as governor. Burr now learned that Pike was exploring the best route to Santa Fé; and Wilkinson heard what was not news to him, that the West and South were eager for a fight with Spain, that an army could be raised in a few days for the conquest of Mexico. To all appearances there was no break in their friendship, nor any abatement of enthusiasm. In truth it could have been no object of minor importance which called Burr at that season so far out of his way. Wilkinson attempted to depreciate this visit by repeating under oath at the trial at Richmond the following conversation:<sup>1</sup>—

“Mr. Burr speaking of the imbecility of the Government said it would molder to pieces, die a natural death, or words to that effect, adding that the people of the Western country were ready to revolt. To this I recollect replying that, if he had not profited more by his journey in other respects, he had better have remained at Washington or Philadelphia; for surely, said I, my friend, no person was ever more mistaken! The Western people disaffected to the Government! They are bigoted to Jefferson and democracy.”

What was equally to the point, the General claimed to have written, upon the departure of the ex-Vice-President, a letter denouncing him to the Secretary of the Navy; Wilkinson thought its text about as follows:

<sup>1</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 1807-08, p. 611.

"Burr is about something, but whether internal or external I cannot discover. I think you should keep an eye on him."

In spite of the paucity of the testimony, Hildreth<sup>1</sup> and others have tacitly credited Wilkinson with having, at so early a date, given notice of the approaching danger. There are, however, no available data to show that his interest in the career of Burr had flagged, for we find him carefully fostering the deception that Burr sought to be returned to Congress. When Burr left St. Louis for Vincennes, capital of Indiana Territory, which place he reached September 23d, he carried with him this letter from Wilkinson to Governor William Henry Harrison:<sup>2</sup>

"I will demand from your friendship a boon in its influence co-extensive with the Union; a boon, perhaps, on which the Union may much depend; a boon which may serve me, may serve you, and disserve neither. . . . If you ask, What is this important boon which I so earnestly crave? I will say to you, return the bearer to the councils of our country, where his talents and abilities are all-important at the present moment."

From Vincennes, at the time he set out for Washington, Burr wrote Wilkinson that the matter of which he had written had not been mentioned in his conversation. But whether the General had or had not discountenanced Burr's projects, there were not wanting those who looked askance at his Western meanderings. Before he had begun his homeward journey the news-

<sup>1</sup>*History of the United States*, v., 599.

<sup>2</sup>*Parton's Life of Burr*, ii., 50.

papers attributed to him as many plots as the ingenuity of the sensation-monger could conjure up.

"We have been frequently asked," explained the editor of the *Lexington Gazette*, "why we have paid such attention to the movements of Mr. Burr since his arrival in the Western country. The latter part of his political career, fraught, perhaps, with a degree of duplicity which can never be satisfactorily defended, has made him an object of attention wherever he has traveled. His talents for intrigue are considered as unrivalled in America, and his disposition doubted by few. The subsequent queries have lately appeared in the *Gazette of the United States*. Whether any circumstances have come to the knowledge of the writer which would justify such a publication, we are uninformed. Without giving an opinion as to his views in this country, we publish the queries, . . . at the same time believing that if he calculated on withdrawing the affections of the people of the Western States from their Government, he will find himself deceived, if he has not already made the discovery."<sup>1</sup>

Here are the queries alluded to:

"How long will it be before we shall hear of Colonel Burr being at the head of a revolutionary party on the Western waters? Is it a fact that Colonel Burr has formed a plan to engage the adventurous and enterprising young men from the Atlantic States to Louisiana? Is it one of the inducements that an immediate convention will be called from the States bordering on the Ohio and Mississippi to form a separate government? Is it another that all the public lands are to be seized and partitioned among these States, except what is reserved for the warlike friends and followers of Burr in the revolution? Is it part of the plan for the new States to grant the new lands in bounties to entice inhabitants from the Atlantic States? How soon will the forts and magazines and all

<sup>1</sup>*Palladium*, September 7, 1805.

the military posts at New Orleans and on the Mississippi be in the hands of Colonel Burr's revolutionary party? How soon will Colonel Burr engage in the reduction of Mexico by granting liberty to its inhabitants, and seizing on its treasures, aided by British ships and forces? What difficulty can there be in completing a revolution in one summer, among the Western States, when they will gain the Congress lands, will throw off the public debt, will seize their own revenues, and enjoy the plunder of Spain?"

To say the least, this was a remarkable set of interrogations; and what was equally remarkable was the avidity with which it was seized on by the press and circulated with added comment from border to border of the country. It was a sensational story, and whether it were the product of some quill-driver of a partisan sheet, or the naked fact, the readers of the "yellow" journals of that day had no means of ascertaining. They rarely questioned; in the absence of the telegraph it was no easy task to verify a report, and such writers as John Wood and Duane, Cheetham and Callender never pothered over uncertainties. In the West at this time the papers were a unit in denouncing the unfair and altogether slanderous insinuations that the frontiersmen were eager for lawless measures. But in spite of expressions of affection for the Constitution and for the Union, the impression spread abroad that the West was once more on the verge of slipping under the Spanish yoke; or, indeed, of enlisting under the banner of an adventurer. In this way the country was gradually prepared for the events of the ensuing year. Nor were these whispers of suspicion to be stayed by the boundaries of the Republic. Before the end of

July—a month before Clark reported the rumors from New Orleans, weeks before the newspapers took up the alarm—the news had reached our warlike neighbors in Texas that Aaron Burr, ex-Vice-President, had come to New Orleans under military escort, and that it was reported he meditated some extraordinary enterprise, the exact nature of which was still in doubt.<sup>1</sup> Likewise the stirring news spread eastward. On August 4th, while Burr was emerging from the wilderness to the south of Nashville, Merry hastened to communicate to Lord Mulgrave that the scheme had been betrayed or had been ruined through publicity:

“Notwithstanding that the confidential person, whom, as I had the honor to mention to your lordship in my despatch No. 22 [March 29th] Mr. Burr had said that he intended to send to me, has not as yet appeared, I learn that that gentleman has commenced his plan in the Western country, and apparently with much success, although it would seem, that he or some of his agents have either been indiscreet in their communications, or have been betrayed by some person, in whom they considered that they had reason to confide, for the object of his journey has now begun to be noticed in the public prints, where it is said that a convention is to be called immediately from the States bordering on the Ohio and Mississippi for the purpose of forming a separate government. It is, however, possible that the business may be so far advanced as, from the nature of it, to render any further secrecy impossible. The best accounts of Mr. Burr were from St. Louis, from whence he had proceeded to New Orleans, and it is observed that he had been received everywhere with the most marked attention.”<sup>2</sup>

A year had elapsed since Merry had made his first

<sup>1</sup>Valle to Elguezabal, July 30, 1805; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Merry to Mulgrave, August 4, 1805; MSS. British Archives.



report to the Foreign Office of Burr's project; months had passed since the notable letter of March 29th had been dispatched—and yet the home Government was silent. The Minister should have taken the hint. But far from that, his enthusiasm was unbounded when he learned through current rumor that the undertaking was actually begun. Here was a triumph to boast of, for had he not rendered an early account of it to the Foreign Office? This time, however, his information had come through the medium of the press, and Yrujo read the same paragraphs and inclosed them to Cevallos, the Spanish Minister of State, with a letter dated August 5th, one day after Merry had penned his account. Referring to Burr's secret interviews with the English Minister, his demand for a passport to Mexico, the draughting instruments, he registered again his suspicions, adding, however, that the West at the moment was unripe for Burr's designs, and scoffing at the idea of an attack on Mexico. In conclusion, Yrujo showed in a paragraph that he had almost fathomed the business of Burr:

“The supposed expedition against Mexico is ridiculous and chimerical in the present state of things; but I am not unaware that Burr, in order to get moneys from the English Minister or from England, has made to him some such proposition, in which he is to play the leading rôle.”<sup>1</sup>

Yrujo little knew that his turn to be deceived by the conspirators in their casting about for funds was close at hand. They appeared to the Spanish Minister

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, August 5, 1805; MSS. Spanish Archives.

masked, as Merry had seen them, though the make-up had been varied with the necessities of the case.

Thus, before the summer of 1805 had expired the country from North to South was vibrant with tales of a plot, or rather of as many plots as ingenuity could contrive—nothing was tangible. Toward the middle of November, 1805, Burr had reached Washington without mishap from his Western tour, and went at once to the British Legation—Dayton who had been ill in the West had only two days prior made a report to Merry—to unroll his budget of falsehoods and to learn the fate of his propositions. Finding no reply he straightway widened and deepened his schemes for obtaining money. That all-essential element to his success he was determined to secure, without regard to consequences immediate or future.

## CHAPTER III.

### *Burr's Intrigues.*



WHEN Aaron Burr had returned to Washington from his summer in the West, he was fully satisfied that his project could fail only for want of the "sinews of war." Everywhere through the Western country he had been applauded as the leader who was to march an army to the heart of the Kingdom of Mexico, giving freedom to her enslaved millions, and, incidentally, fortunes to his followers. The Westerners—excitable, sympathetic, liberty-loving, and patriotic—longed for an opportunity to retaliate against Spain for insults of long standing, and they were ready to accept the smallest provocation as excuse for an assault on her decaying empire. Burr gave them to understand that a war with their old oppressor was only a matter of time; that the Government would not interfere with his plans; while to some he said that an expedition for the invasion of the Spanish territories would be formed regardless of cause or consequence. It was against this emergency that he needed half a million dollars; and in the pursuit of which he invoked all his powers of dissimulation—conduct which has come in this later day, from the false light thrown upon the movement to distort and condemn it.

In this involved scheme the British Minister, or King George, was designed as the chief victim; and

Burr's first interview with Merry upon returning to Washington from the West was a masterpiece of intrigue. Merry scrupulously reported the whole of Burr's story to Lord Mulgrave.<sup>1</sup> Burr opened with the remark that he thought the English Government disposed—

“to afford him their assistance, but he observed that the information which had reached him on this head was not sufficiently explicit to authorize him to send a confidential person to London to make to them the necessary communication as he had promised and intended. He was therefore now obliged to try the effect of those which I might be able to convey. . . . These disappointments gave him, he said, the deepest concern, because his journey through the Western country and Louisiana as far as New Orleans, as well as through a part of West Florida, had been attended with so much more success than he had even looked for, that everything was in fact completely prepared in every quarter for the execution of his plan; and because he had therefore been induced to enter into an engagement with his associates and friends to return to them in the month of March next, in order to commence the operations.”

That Merry—who had more than three months earlier reported to Lord Mulgrave the successful commencement of the Western enterprise; who had seen in the newspapers at least a dozen projects attributed to the ex-Vice-President—should have asked no questions, but have put in an official dispatch with his indorsement the whole of Burr's story, is more a compliment to his industry and ambition than to his sagacity or intelligence. Burr's fear of delay in receiving the pecuniary

<sup>1</sup>Merry to Lord Mulgrave, November 25, 1805; MSS. British Archives.

assistance led him to say to Merry that the inauguration of his plan was set for March, while in reality so early a date was never contemplated. Because of the shortness of the time and the winter season it was wholly out of the question. It was announced in the West for the ensuing fall; and the correspondence and every step taken by the conspirators show that to have been the earliest time considered. Burr's next point of deception was that he had received encouraging communications which gave him "room to hope and expect that his Majesty's government were disposed to afford him their assistance." But the truth was that neither Colonel Williamson nor any other agent of Burr had appeared or seems likely ever to have appeared before the English Cabinet. The fact that Merry never received a line on the subject of the negotiation from the Foreign Office is proof conclusive that the Government never gave an outsider encouragement. To have Merry believe the contrary, however, was but a skillful device used by Burr to secure his approbation of the plan; for clearly it would have been disastrous for an arrangement to be made through any other medium than himself.

"He [Burr] was sensible that no complete understanding on the subject could well take place without verbal communication; but he flattered himself that enough might be explained in this way to give a commencement to the business, and that any ulterior arrangements might safely be left till the personal interviews he should have with the persons properly authorized for the purpose, whom he recommended to be sent with the ships of war, which it was necessary should cruise off the mouth of the Mississippi at the latest by the 10th of April next,

and to continue there until the commanding officers should receive information from him or from Mr. Daniel Clark of the country having declared itself independent."

This splendid secret of the West declaring itself independent was not new to Merry, for the public prints, as Burr well knew, had only recently declared that a convention was soon to be called for just such a purpose. But in reality if such a proposition was ever mooted save by industrious editors there is no trace of it.

Ostensibly to secure the success of his undertaking Burr now requested that to his former estimate of naval strength should be added a number of—

"smaller vessels; because the overture which had been made to him at New Orleans from a person of the greatest influence in East and West Florida and the information he had otherwise acquired respecting the state of those countries, having convinced him that they are equally disposed to render themselves independent; and while he had good reason to believe that the same spirit prevails in many other parts of the Spanish dominions on this continent, such force with that which he should be able to provide would be required to defend the entrance of the river and the coasts of Florida and to keep up a free communication with the sea and those places where it might be found expedient to act."

Here was indeed another lever, which, so far as Burr could see, promised to be effective; but which in reality worked greatly to the injury of his cause—if there had ever been a chance for it. So long as an attack on the integrity of the Union was in contemplation, King George might be expected to open his strong-box in its support; but to bring the Floridas and

"other places where it might be found expedient to act" within the scope of action was to close all avenues securely. True, England was at war with Spain, and an attack on the enemy, to all appearances, would be welcomed; but Burr was not aware that the British Ministry, while aiding Miranda, the South American patriot, in a minor way, were already considering plans for the absorption of the Spanish colonies, and would therefore look upon his enlarged scheme with disapprobation. In this connection Burr spoke of Miranda:

"At the last meeting I had with Mr. Burr," said Merry, "he told me that he had just received notice from New York of the arrival there from England of General Miranda who appeared by his information to have been sent to this country by his Majesty's government, to co-operate with him in the plan of operations against South America."

So there was a "plan of operations against South America." Burr, however, disparaged Miranda's character, declaring that he possessed neither discretion nor talents. But if either Miranda or Burr thought England disposed to carry on an unselfish war for the independence of Spanish America they were unacquainted with the history of the Tories. The disposition of the Spanish colonies "to render themselves independent" was the controlling fear of the Ministry. The situation was clearly stated the following year in an official dispatch written upon receipt of the news of the capture of Buenos Ayres by a British force:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Windham to Beresford, September 21, 1806; MSS. British Archives.

"The great and ruling consideration which has so long restrained his Majesty from invading this part of the enemies' territories [Spanish America], has been the fear of exciting in those countries, from their known impatience of their forms of government, a spirit of insurrection and revolt leading to consequences the most fatal and which except by the presence of a very superior force, his Majesty might not have the means of controlling."

Burr never mentioned names, nor spoke in precise terms of his plans; the results of his Western tour were exhibited to Merry only in broad outlines:

"Throughout the Western country," said he, "persons of the greatest property and influence had engaged themselves to contribute very largely towards the expense of the enterprise; at New Orleans he represented the inhabitants to be so firmly resolved upon separating themselves from their union with the United States, and every way to be so completely prepared, that he was sure the revolution there would be accomplished without a drop of blood being shed, the American force in that country (should it not, as he had good reason to believe, enlist with him) not being sufficiently strong to make any opposition. It was accordingly there that the revolution would commence at the end of [March?] May<sup>1</sup> or the beginning of April, provided his Majesty's government should consent to lend their assistance toward it, and the answer, together with the pecuniary aid which would be wanted, arrive in time to enable him to set out the beginning of March."

Burr frequently recurred to the urgency of an early reply to his propositions, especially emphasizing the necessity of an early remittance of funds, for upon the arrival of the latter depended the march of his enterprise. He insisted that the money should be got

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Henry Adams, iii., 230.



secretly into his hands, as he indicated in his first overtures; and suggested that he would himself devise a way to get into his possession, without its becoming known or suspected, a part of the two hundred thousand pounds which the United States were soon to pay to his Majesty's Government. In the end, failing in the first plan, proviso was made that one hundred and ten thousand pounds, which he now asked of Pitt, should be credited in the names of John Barclay of Philadelphia and Daniel Clark of New Orleans. Burr endeavored to impress the Minister with the revolutionary state of affairs in Louisiana, bringing up again the absurd notion that the inhabitants, though descendants of French and Spanish parents, were anxious to cast off their traditional hostility to England and to embrace her in the new cause.

"Mr. Burr stated to me—what I have reason to believe to be true from the information I have received from other quarters—that when he reached Louisiana he found the inhabitants so impatient under the American government that they had actually prepared a representation of their grievances, and that it was in agitation to send deputies with it to Paris. The hope, however, of becoming completely independent, and of forming a much more beneficial connection with Great Britain, having been pointed out to them, and this having already prevailed among many of the principal people who are become his associates, they have found means to obtain a suspension of the plan of having recourse to France; but he observed that if the execution of that which he had in view should be delayed beyond the time he had mentioned the opportunity would be lost; and France would, as he knew it positively to be her wish, regain that country and annex the Floridas to it."

A more convincing presentation of the case could

not have been made; but the English Cabinet had cause to know that it was groundless—France was not then playing for such stakes. Burr, however, was ignorant of the situation of affairs in Europe and continued to press the argument, which had always been so potent, of the danger from French interference. Merry believed the whole of the story, even to Burr's forecast of the dissolution of the Republic.

“He observed, what I readily conceive may happen, that when once Louisiana and the Western country became independent, the Eastern States will separate themselves immediately from the Southern; and that thus the immense power which is now risen up with so much rapidity in the western hemisphere will, by such a division, be rendered at once formidable; and that no moment could be so proper for the undertaking in question and particularly for Great Britain to take part in it as the present, when she has the command of the ocean and France is prevented from showing that interference in the business which she would otherwise certainly exercise.”

Merry, while recommending the “practicability and great utility” of the project, thought that “his Majesty may have already been disposed to take part in the affair.” Thus completely had the Minister been blinded. Burr, however, realized that the winning over of the British Cabinet was quite another matter. Indeed it appeared from the unbroken silence almost hopeless. So he turned to other quarters, still with a view to obtaining the moneys he calculated necessary for his purposes. While in Washington he was cordially received at the White House. Yrujo said that Jefferson both penetrated and feared him. Before leav-

ing the Capital the ex-Vice-President wrote Blennerhassett concerning his plans. December 21st the latter replied:

"I hope, sir, you will not regard it indelicate in me to observe to you how highly I should be honored in being associated with you, in any contemplated enterprise you would permit me to participate in. . . . Viewing the probability of a rupture with Spain, the claim for action the country will make upon your talents, in the event of an engagement against, or subjugation of, any of the Spanish territories, I am disposed, in the confidential spirit of this letter, to offer you my friends' and my own services to coöperate in any contemplated measures in which you may embark."<sup>1</sup>

To this flattering note Burr sent in reply an explicit definition of the nature of his undertaking:<sup>2</sup>

"I had projected, and still meditate, a speculation precisely of the character you have described. . . . The business, however, depends, in some degree, on contingencies not within my control, and will not be commenced before December or January, if ever. . . . But I must insist that these intimations be not permitted to interrupt the prosecution of any plans which you have formed for yourself—no occupation which shall not take you off the continent can interfere with that which I propose. . . . We shall have no war unless we should be actually invaded."

Burr's revelations to Blennerhassett left no doubt as to the object in view. The contingencies upon which the movement turned were a Spanish war or the receipt of pecuniary assistance either from Merry or Yrujo, or

<sup>1</sup>Blennerhassett to Burr, *Blennerhassett Papers*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Burr to Blennerhassett, April 15, 1806; *Blennerhassett Papers*, p. 119.

other source. The single idea of the two notes, that of the conquest of Spanish regions, fired young and old alike; it was therefore not surprising to find characters so divergent as Blennerhassett, Andrew Jackson, Clark, Wilkinson and General Presley Neville anxious to participate in whatever fortune should be allotted to the fascinating undertaking. All the while, too, Burr had the satisfaction of witnessing the increasing difficulties of the Government in its attempt to stem the flood of indignation against Spain. The Administration was severely criticized for its tardiness in taking up the gauntlet which Cevallos, as spokesman for the King, had cast at the feet of our Ministers. Said a plain-spoken editor of the *Political and Commercial Register*:

“What is the situation of our governmental character with foreign powers? The United States, so lately the wonder and admiration of the world, are fallen so low, that even the Spaniard prowls on our defenseless merchantmen, and loudly proclaims the pusillanimity of our leader. What is the policy of the present Cabinet? Why do they conceal their measures and the information they possess from the people who raised them to authority? Why veil from the public eye the treatment of our Ministers at the court of Madrid? Do they fear that the people themselves will demand vengeance against the aggressors?”<sup>1</sup>

The *United States Gazette* observed that “we are to depend for our safety, for the enjoyment of our rights, not upon the wisdom and vigor of our Administration, nor upon the strength, nor the resources of our country, but upon the clemency and forbearance of

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, September 27, 1805.

other nations.”<sup>1</sup> From one end of the Republic to the other the Government was decried for its attitude, whether it endeavored to conceal evidences of Spanish meanness, or tried to steer clear of the breakers of war. The President sought to ease matters by purchasing the Floridas. Though we claimed West Florida under the treaty for the sale of Louisiana, and had even passed a law regulating the collection of customs at Mobile, Jefferson thought the easiest way out of the embroglio was to pay out. But his plan encountered opposition in Congress. John Randolph, the one towering figure in the House, strenuously opposed it; and sharply arraigned the President for having a “double set of opinions and principles—the one ostensible, the other real.” In the first case he appeared in his Message of December 3, 1805, to favor vigorous measures against Spain; in the second, three days later, he secretly appealed to Congress to appropriate moneys for the purchase of lands, a part of which he had professed to believe already ours. In the midst of the discussion, January 3d, Randolph laid before the Representatives a spirited, warlike report based on the Message of December 3d. The closing resolution read that the Southern frontier was to be protected “from Spanish inroad and insult.” Indeed it went further: measures were to be resorted to which meant, beyond peradventure, conflict with Spain. By plying the party lash Jefferson succeeded in having Randolph’s Resolution buried under a bill which carried with it \$2,000,000 for the purchase of the Floridas. The President had

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, November 22, 1805.

carried his point, but the report of such a bill provoked more than partisan rebuke throughout the Union.

"There was a happy moment," ran a paragraph in the *Orleans Gazette*,<sup>1</sup> "when the government of the United States, with every plea of justice and necessity on its side, might, at a blow, have expelled the Spaniards from our shores. It required nothing but the sanction of authority, and the generous spirit of the nation, which had left far behind the nerveless soul of the Government, would have performed the business even without a reward. . . . If the wise counsels of Federal men had been listened to, we should in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, have the rightful possession of those territories, which form a natural and very important appendage of our own."

Editor Bradford of the *Orleans Gazette* was an undisguised revolutionist, and had admitted to his columns, at the time of Burr's first visit to the West, an article which might have been copied in part from the annals of the French Revolution:<sup>2</sup>—

"By a war she [Spain] would have everything to lose, and nothing to win. . . . To the east the Floridas would fall into our hands without opposition, and to the southwest, New Mexico, with all its wealth, opposes no obstacle to invasion. . . . This conquest would give us the key to the southern continent; and the soldiers of Liberty, animated by the spirit of '76 and the genius of their Washington, would go to the field, not with a hope of plunder, but to avenge the cause of their country, and to give freedom to a new world. The innocent blood of the natives, which was so lavishly spilt by the merciless Cortez and Pizarro, yet calls aloud for vengeance, and the descendants of Montezuma and Mango Capac, would draw the avenging sword, . . . on the first approach

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, March 28, 1806.

<sup>2</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, May 24, 1805.

of an invading army. . . . Thus in eighteen months would the two continents own the dominion of laws."

Bradford did not stand alone—there were many others in the States who saw the matter as he; for the maxims of the French Revolution were still living forces. The morbid sentiment indulged over the condition of the inhabitants of the Spanish colonies is one more proof that nations are oftentimes blind to their own shortcomings. For why should charity not have begun at home in granting freedom to the negro slaves? By this it is not meant to question the sincerity of the enthusiasm of the American mind for the emancipation of the colonies of Don Carlos. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe in the honesty of the desire; but it was so intermingled with the lust for revenge against a sovereign whose territories were coveted, that the measure of its intensity is lost.

Favorable, even flattering, the situation appeared to the leaders of the conspiracy. There were few who dreamed of the difficulties to be overcome; of the need for money and the crying want thereof; of prejudices and distempers to be combated, which were to prove fatal in the end. Perhaps only Dayton and Wilkinson were in the innermost secret, and aided in devising ways and means. Wilkinson drew from his own experience, and the intrigues with Merry and Yrujo reflect his handiwork, while he has left us convincing proof of his complicity in the enterprising design of defrauding both Spain and England. Scarcely had the conspiracy collapsed when Wilkinson confessed in a confidential dispatch to Jefferson:

"No doubt remains with me that he [Burr] has duped both the British and Spanish legations and converted them to his use, by the promise of the subversion of our Government on the one hand, and the revolutionizing of Mexico on the other."<sup>1</sup>

The knowledge of the stratagem which was to be used with the Ministers was well employed by Wilkinson when once he had begun his denunciations, for he was also aware that the country at large was confounded by the mingling of the two sets of arguments.

Although Dayton and Burr were unpractised in the art of extracting specie from foreign coffers, they learned their lesson with so much facility that it was clear James Wilkinson had been their instructor. December 1st, after his interviews with Merry, Burr reached Philadelphia whither Dayton had preceded him. There, December 5th, the Marquis of Caso Yrujo was secretly visited by Dayton, who was primed with an excellently prepared story which it was thought would bring Yrujo to the financial aid of the scheme. Dayton began by saying that he thought thirty or forty thousand dollars would not be an excessive sum to pay for certain events which were transpiring at London upon whose outcome hung the fate of the most precious possessions of the Spanish monarchy. Yrujo assured him that his master was liberal and would reward services. Thus encouraged the ex-Senator began by saying that he was one of three persons in this country who knew of the plot; that the Government was ig-

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson to Jefferson, February 13, 1807; Letters in Relation to Burr's Conspiracy; MSS. State Department Archives.



norant of it, but not less concerned than Spain. Then he continued:<sup>1</sup>—

“Toward the close of the last session and the end of March, Colonel Burr had various secret conferences with the English minister, to whom he proposed a plan not only for taking the Floridas, but also for effecting the separation and independence of the States of the West,—a part of this plan being that the Floridas shall be associated in this new federative republic; England to receive as a reward for her services a decisive preference in matters of commerce and navigation, these advantages to be secured by means of a treaty which will be made upon the recognition by England of this new republic. This plan met the approbation of the English minister, who recommended it to his court. In the meantime Colonel Burr has been in New Orleans, in the Mississippi Territory, the States of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio, to sound and prepare their minds for this revolution. In all these States he found their dispositions most favorable not only for their emancipation which they evidently desire, but also for leading an expedition against the Kingdom of Mexico. This is an idea that occurred to us after sending the first plan to London; and having given greater extension to the project, Colonel Burr sent to London a dispatch with his new ideas to Colonel Williamson, an English officer who has been for a long time in this country, and whose return is expected within a month or six weeks. The first project was well received by the English Cabinet; more particularly by Mr. Dundas, or Lord Melville, who was charged with the correspondence; but as he had reason to fear dismissal from office for causes well known through the debates of Parliament, the plan has been retarded; but Mr. Pitt has again turned his attention to it. In order to effect the conquest of the Floridas and the emancipation of the Western States half a million dollars has been appropriated; the expedition on the part of England will be composed of three ships of the line and seven or eight smaller

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, December 5, 1805; MSS. Spanish Archives.

armed vessels which will bring arms, ammunition and artillery, but few men, as men were not needed."

The conspirators never turned out a more palpably fictitious fabric. Yet with the strength of it Dayton and Burr hoped to bind Yrujo to the project; and somehow to terrify Don Carlos into paying the expenses of an enterprise against his own possessions. The irony of it is fascinating. Yrujo was in a more treacherous situation than Merry. As for the latter, Burr employed his wiles to make him a catspaw to draw from the British treasury half a million dollars; while the former was to contribute funds for a secret which had been contrived to entrap him, to disguise the real object of the association, and which would have been revealed to him in any case. If an assault was really to be made on the Spanish provinces, it was but plain foresight to disarm Yrujo, or better still to leave him nursing the idea that his Sovereign was aiding in the dispersion of the Power in the Western World which menaced the integrity of his Empire.

The Marquis was assured that the Western States would declare themselves independent the moment the English squadron appeared off the coast of Florida in February or March; that in order to make the revolution more popular after having taken the Floridas the expedition against Mexico would be attempted; that Miranda had just been sent to this country by the English Government to act in concert with Burr; that no opposition from the feeble Federal Government was anticipated; that the United States troops were nearly all in the West, and that Colonel Burr had caused them to

be sounded in regard to the expedition against Mexico; that they were all ready to follow him and that there was no doubt they were also ready to support the rights of the Westerners against the impotent forces of the Federal Government. In the operations against Mexico, England would coöperate by sea; a landing would probably be made at Panuco. Dayton avowed that Burr had emissaries in the interior of the province of Texas, and that he had sent some also to Vera Cruz and other points on the coast with the moneys which he had already received from England; that he meant to convert into a republic or republics the Spanish provinces which should be conquered or revolutionized. ✓

Yrujo observed to Cevallos that the acquisition of Louisiana had rendered inevitable the separation of the West from the Union within the space of two years, and that the Floridas would succumb to the revolution. He was confident, however, that the Administration would not be deceived by the wiles of Burr. Yrujo's distrust of Dayton, whom he recognized as Burr's spokesman, was great. He saw at once that England had not encouraged the affair to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds, for, had she done so, Dayton would not have come to him, as he said to Cevallos, the alert Minister of State, to play the part of the "faithful thief, relating a secret, which, for many reasons, he was interested in concealing from him." Thus the main end sought had been accomplished—Yrujo no longer credited the prevailing rumors that Mexico was the objective point, for, had it been so, the conspirators would not have been guilty of the folly of making a X

clean breast of it. However, partially successful though they had been, Burr and the ex-Senator feared they had gone too far; so, when the latter returned to Philadelphia from a fortnight in Washington he was prepared to unfold another story fantastic and absurd in the highest degree. But this time, singularly enough, Yrujo was completely taken in.

After referring to Burr's resolve to have nothing to do with Miranda, whom he thought wanting in many qualities necessary to lead a great enterprise, Dayton made bold to say that the English end of the intrigue had met with reverses, hinting that negotiations in that quarter were abandoned; whereas we know the hopes of the conspirators in British aid were still high. Burr had been on the eve of dispatching to London an intimate by the name of Wharton, continued Dayton, to renew the negotiations, when another plan had suggested itself:<sup>1</sup>—

“This project, excepting the attack on the Floridas, he [Burr] thinks, as well as his chief friends, may be put in execution without foreign aid. For one who does not know the country, its Constitution, and, above all certain localities, this plan would appear insane; but I confess, for my part, that in view of all the circumstances it seems easy of execution, although it would irritate the Atlantic States, especially those called central—namely, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. It is indisputable that there is in this country an infinite number of adventurers, without property, full of ambition, and ready to unite at once under the standard of a revolution which promises to better their situation. It is almost certain that Burr and his friends, without disclosing their true object, have won the good will of these

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, January 1, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

men and inspired them with the greatest confidence in favor of Burr, whose intrigues during the past year were devoted to the fanning of the flames of discord against the existing government in Louisiana and the Western States which he visited."

Burr's "new idea," which Yrujo thought would "probably be carried into effect," was to introduce by degrees into the Federal city and its environs a certain number of his desperate followers, well armed, who, at a signal, with Burr at their head would surprise at the same instant the President, the Vice-President, and the President of the Senate. Burr would then dissolve the existing government, possess himself of the public money deposited in the Washington and Georgetown banks and seize the arsenal on the Eastern Branch. Profiting by the consternation such a blow would produce, the conspirators would try to make favorable terms with the States; but should they fail to maintain themselves at Washington, which seemed probable, they would burn the national vessels at the Navy Yards, except two or three frigates which were ready for sea, and embarking on these with the treasure, they would sail for New Orleans, where upon their arrival they would proclaim the independence of Louisiana and the West.<sup>1</sup>

It would be as easy to believe in the truthfulness of one of Baron Münchhausen's tales as that Burr seriously contemplated so utterly harebrained an enterprise as Dayton now revealed to the Marquis. If it had not already appeared indisputable that Yrujo was to be

<sup>1</sup>Adams (iii., 239), McMaster (iii., 62), and others think that Burr actually meditated such a *coup d'état*.

deceived for a double purpose, it would be legitimate to inquire into Burr's sanity. That such a high-handed, buccaneering plot had the shadow of a chance to reach maturity could not have been believed by any one acquainted with American character, or the actual situation of affairs. And yet Yrujo thought it certain of success, observing to Cevallos that "Spain would view with extreme satisfaction the dismemberment of the colossal power which was growing up at the very gates of her most precious and important colonies." The great difficulty to be surmounted in the execution of this momentous project was "the acquisition of half a million or a million dollars which the principals calculated would be necessary to expend for provisions, arms, pay for men," et cetera. The solution was easy—Burr had offered to sell his services to Spain, and Yrujo intimated that the King ought to come to his aid, for the following reasons:

"At a second conference with this subject [Dayton] he told me that Burr had authorized him to say that in this second project, which was the one determined upon, Spain had nothing to fear for her possessions; that on the contrary he counted on her friendship because of her obvious interest in the success of the enterprise; that the matter of the Louisiana boundary would be arranged to our entire satisfaction; . . . that the Floridas would be undisturbed, not only out of respect for Spain, but because his political interest demanded that a foreign nation should hold possessions both in the Atlantic States and those of the West."

For the moment Burr's success with Yrujo was as complete as it had been with Merry—and he had every cause to hope that he would yet receive financial succor

which would enable him to purchase ships, arms, and necessities for the equipment of his expedition. So much was he encouraged with the situation that he wrote to Wilkinson, December 12th:

"About the last of October our cabinet was seriously disposed for war with the Spaniards; but more recent accounts of the increasing and alarming aggressions and annoyance of the British, and some courteous words from the French, have banished every such intention. In case of such warfare, Lee would have been commander-in-chief: truth I assure you: he must you know come from Virginia. . . . On the subject of a certain speculation, it is not deemed material to write till the whole can be communicated. The circumstance referred to in a letter from Ohio remains in suspense: the auspices, however, are favorable, and it is believed that Wilkinson will give audience to a delegation composed of Adair and Dayton in February. Can 25—— be had in your vicinity to move at some few hours' notification?"<sup>1</sup>

Burr regretted the peaceful course of Government—the non-materialization of the Spanish War; and his characterization of the political status was eminently correct. Concerning a certain speculation—doubtless the intrigues with the Spanish and British ministers—he could only give Wilkinson hope. The reference to Adair and Dayton and the question as to the number of men which could be had were intelligible only to the General.

While waiting for replies to the representations which had been made by Merry and Yrujo to their respective Governments, Burr continued to enlarge the circle of his associates. During the early months of

<sup>1</sup>Burr to Wilkinson, December 12, 1806; Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. lxxxiv.

1806 he approached Commodore Truxton with the proposition that he should command the naval arm of an expedition against Mexico; and to William Eaton, who was engaged in pressing before Congress a very doubtful claim to certain pecuniary restitutions, he laid bare not only the first plan, but also that which had so taken Yrujo: "He would turn Congress neck and heels out of doors, assassinate the President (or what amounted to that), and declare himself the protector of an energetic Government." Believing in these horribly criminal designs of the ex-Vice-President, some time in March Eaton called on the President and suggested that "Colonel Burr ought to be removed from the country" because he was dangerous in it. Either the post at Madrid or London was considered by Eaton a secure place for the exile of Mr. Burr. If anything could give rise to a suspicion of this informant's integrity, it is this conversation with Jefferson. It was in March, too, that Burr applied in person to the President for an appointment, which fact Jefferson notes in his "Anas" under date of April 15th. This coincident provokes the suspicion that Burr had bribed Eaton to prepare the ground for his personal application for a foreign appointment. Why were Madrid and London specified? Could Burr have planned to undertake at shorter range the intrigues which were then progressing with those courts? It was either that or a ruse, for Burr must have known in advance what Jefferson's reply would be. 'He had lost the confidence of the country, and could not be appointed,' were the President's words.



In the middle of April, Burr wrote Blennerhassett that the business, which depended on contingencies beyond his control, would not begin until December or January, if ever.<sup>1</sup> To Wilkinson he said:

"The execution of our project is postponed till December: want of water in Ohio, rendered movement impracticable: other reasons rendered delay expedient. The association is enlarged, and comprises all that Wilkinson could wish. Confidence limited to a few. . . . *Burr* wrote you a long letter last December, replying to a short one deemed very silly. Nothing has been heard from Brigadier since October. Is Cusion et Portes right? Address *Burr* at Washington."<sup>2</sup>

"Cusion and Portes" were officers on the frontier, Wilkinson the "Brigadier" confessed; but Burr's object was not so much to find out whether they were "right" as to impress the general with the fact that the association was enlarged and comprised all that he could wish. "Want of water in Ohio" was a clever way of saying that thus far he had failed in his purpose with Merry and Yrujo.

While these things were occurring in the East the news of warlike preparations in Kentucky was making its way across Texas and the deserts of North Mexico to Captain-General Salcedo at Chihuahua. Early in 1806 Antonio Cordero, Governor of the Province of Texas, had received notice that an expedition was being prepared in Kentucky which was to overrun the provinces of Mexico. This news had reached the Governor, not through the instrumentality of Yrujo, but

<sup>1</sup>*Blennerhassett Papers*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Burr to Wilkinson, April 16, 1806; *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. lxxxiii.

directly from the Spanish agents in Louisiana. The report was alarming.

"It is a very grave matter," responded Salcedo, April 9th,<sup>1</sup> "the information which your excellency has received and transmitted to me—that some ten thousand men, subjects of the United States, are being prepared in Kentucky (*Quintoq*), with the object of overpowering the uninhabited provinces of this kingdom and our Indian allies, with no respect for the boundaries of Louisiana. You will therefore take extraordinary precautions toward putting the country in a good state of defense by bringing up all the auxiliaries."

The obnoxious Intendant Morales who had aroused hot indignation in the United States by closing the port of New Orleans, wrote from Pensacola to Viceroy Iturrigaray, "There exists in New Orleans a strong party whose object it is to revolutionize the Kingdom of Mexico, and the conditions on the frontier are entirely favorable to such a design." He stated also that he had been reliably informed that the revolution was to be materially abetted by means of emissaries and papers which were to be circulated throughout the country. Many ecclesiastics were in the plot, and many subjects were already won over.<sup>2</sup>

Again from the frontier came the note of alarm. Francisco Viana, Inspector-General of the troops in Texas, from his headquarters at Nacogdoches dispatched to Cordero this message:<sup>3</sup>—

"The rumor grows that the American forces are

<sup>1</sup>Salcedo to Cordero, April 9, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Morales to Iturrigaray, May 12, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Viana to Cordero, June 3, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

gathering in Kentucky, and that our unpeopled lands, neophytes, and vassal Indians are to fall into their hands. And I have neither munitions, arms, provisions, nor soldiers wherewith to uphold our authority. I have despatched a corporal, a trader, and four soldiers to the Tejas Indians, asking that they arm as many as possible and come to my assistance."

The truth was, New Spain was in a wretched condition, and Morales was clear-headed when he avowed that the situation was all the Americans could desire. But the most startling note in this correspondence was the unconscious revelation of the vital purpose of the enterprise.

The disingenuous disclosures of Dayton had thus far produced only in part the desired effect. True, Yrujo had been thrown off his guard, but Cevallos had not been constrained to make the expected advances. New tactics were therefore devised, and Burr himself visited the Marquis in the final hope of obtaining funds and of leaving the minister in a helpless state of incertitude.

"The principal has opened himself to me," wrote Yrujo to Cevallos, May 14, 1806;<sup>1</sup> "and his communications have confirmed me in the idea not only of the possibility, but of the facility of the execution of the project under certain circumstances—to effect which pecuniary aid on our part and on that of France is wanted. I have been very circumspect in my answers and have not compromised myself in any way; and when I return to Spain next spring I shall be the bearer of all the plan with the details which may be wanted. There will also arrive in Spain, more or less simultaneously with me, though by different ways, two or three very respectable persons,

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, May 14, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

both from Louisiana and from Kentucky and Tennessee, with the same object. They all consider the interests of those countries united and in conformity with those of Spain and France; but the principal, or more correctly the principals, here do not wish to open themselves to the Emperor Napoleon's minister [Turreau], as they have no confidence in him. Consequently, it will be proper either not to communicate the matter at all to that Government, or to do it with the request that its representative here remain uninformed; for I repeat, they have no confidence in him, and this has been a condition imposed on me in the communications I have received."

If Bollman's report to Madison and Jefferson concerning Burr's designs can be credited, Burr had divined Napoleon's project of absorbing not only Spain but also her American possessions, and hoped to gain for himself a slice of the crumbling empire.<sup>1</sup> It was therefore but a part of wisdom to leave Napoleon, who was rising toward the zenith of his career, ignorant of any revolutionary scheme which threatened even remotely to cross his own astounding plans. The precaution had been taken to ignore Turreau, but he knew nevertheless, through the press, which never ceased its speculations, of Burr's supposed enterprise for the separation of the States, and wrote his home Government concerning it. Mentioning Miranda's departure, he continued:<sup>2</sup>—

"The project of effecting a separation between the Western and Atlantic States marches abreast with this one. Burr, though displeased at first by the arrival of Miranda, who might reduce him to a secondary rôle, has set off again for the South, after having had several

<sup>1</sup>Madison's *Writings*, ii., 393.

<sup>2</sup>Adams's *History of the United States*, iii., 226.

conferences with the British minister. . . . This division of the confederated States appears to me inevitable, and perhaps less remote than is commonly supposed; but would this event, which England seems to favor, be really contrary to the interests of France?"

Turreau thought the Government ignorant of Burr's intentions; and yet Yrujo in a letter of the same date, February 13th, remarked, "It seems that the Government have penetrated the project of Colonel Burr, and in reality I am apprehensive lest the French minister fearing it prejudicial to his country has informed them."<sup>1</sup> It is amazing that such a perplexing confusion in political affairs could have existed.

Having failed in his personal effort to draw from the Spanish minister a pecuniary response, Burr tried a last resort—he threatened Yrujo with abandoning his favorable attitude toward Spain and with taking up again the web of his English intrigue, whose entangling meshes involved the Floridas and Mexico. June 9th, Yrujo in some uneasiness wrote Cevallos on the subject. Burr had suddenly ceased to visit him, and Dayton explained that this was due to the fact that the new Government in England was anxious to undertake the matter, and that Burr believed it would be more liberal with money advances as well as offer better means of protection. Dayton said that Burr was drawing up supplementary instructions for Williamson, and that Bollman would sail within ten days for London to lay new propositions before the Ministry, and to invite coöperation in an attack on the Floridas. Dayton,

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, February 13, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

still the "faithful thief," informed Yrujo that he had protested to Burr against his unprincipled ambition, and would oppose the attack on the Spanish possessions, which he deemed unjust and impolitic, in the Cabinet council which certain chiefs were to hold in New Orleans in the month of December, proximo. The ex-Senator suggested that the best way to banish such ideas from the heads of the leaders was to reënforce Pensacola and Mobile.

While Yrujo believed to the last that the main design of the associates was the division of the Union, he had warned the officials in the Spanish provinces to be on the alert against surprise. He had, moreover, given Dayton encouragement in the substantial form of fifteen hundred dollars, and in soliciting for him from the King one thousand more along with a pension of fifteen hundred a year.<sup>1</sup> The pension was denied, but the Minister was licensed to pay Dayton, who had indeed demanded much larger sums, another thousand dollars. That was as far as Cevallos was disposed to go. He saw instantly that England had not espoused the cause of Burr, for at the moment Napoleon was free from Continental dangers and England was making preparations for the defense of her own shores. Cevallos further hinted that Dayton had a greater interest in "selling" the secret than in keeping it,<sup>2</sup> but in a later communication intimated to Yrujo that if the United States were determined to war with Spain some use might be made of the malcontents. The

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, February 13, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Cevallos to Yrujo, February 3, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

minister, however, was warned against committing himself or contributing money,<sup>1</sup> and finally in July a few positive lines declared that his Majesty did not wish to protect the designs of Burr.<sup>2</sup> Interested as Cevallos and Godoy were by Yrujo's dispatches, they scented danger in the obviously deceitful intrigue. The truth was, Spain had her hands already full, and it would have been fatuous for her to have become involved in an adventure in the wilds of America which might have led to further reprisals.

On the side of Great Britain a worse outcome attended the endeavors of the conspirators. For almost two years Burr had maintained relations with Merry, but at the end he had only his good wishes—not one of the cabinets had even so much as deigned to reply to his solicitations. And to close this phase of Burr's consummate intrigue, Merry was recalled by Charles James Fox, Chief in the "Ministry of all the Talents," who sent out in his place David Montague Erskine. In one of the last dispatches of Merry, dated November 2, 1806, he related the incidents of his parting interview with Burr:<sup>3</sup>—

"I saw this gentleman [Burr] for the last time at this place [Washington] in the month of June last, when he made particular inquiry whether I had received any answer from my Government to the propositions he had requested me to transmit to them, and lamented exceedingly that I had not, because he, and the persons connected with him at New Orleans, would now, though

<sup>1</sup>Cevallos to Yrujo, March 28, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Cevallos to Yrujo, July 12, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Merry to C. J. Fox, November 2, 1806; MSS. British Archives.

very reluctantly, be under the necessity of addressing themselves to the French and Spanish governments. He added, however, that the disposition of the inhabitants of the Western country, and particularly Louisiana, to separate themselves from the American Union was so strong that the attempt might be made with every prospect of success without any foreign assistance whatever; and his last words to me were that, with or without such support, it certainly would be made very shortly. From these and other circumstances I have little or no doubt of this enterprise being upon the point of execution. From a circumstantial statement of the letter to which I have alluded in my other dispatch, of a large sum of money having arrived in the Western country from New Orleans, it may be inferred, that offers have been made to France and Spain, and that they are lending their assistance to the undertaking. There seems also reason to suspect that the arrival of so large a body of Spanish troops and the force which is expected added to the present state of inactivity may well be connected with the object."

Merry marveled that the Government should have remained "so long in ignorance of the intended design." It was equally marvelous that after his long acquaintance with Burr he should have thought him acting in concert with France and Spain. The truth was that Merry with all his information was more ignorant of what was actually brewing than Jefferson; and it would have been far more ingenuous to have confessed that he was now satisfied that Burr, from his conflicting stories, was untrustworthy, and that his object was involved in mystery. But Merry never awakened to the fact that the deception practiced on him had been complete.

Disastrous as his intrigues had proved in the East



Burr was nothing daunted, and set about raising funds from various individuals, among others Blennerhassett, Smith and Ogden of Miranda fame, and his own son-in-law, Joseph Alston of South Carolina, rich in slaves and plantations. In this way it was hoped enough might be collected to start the expedition, and for the rest, the spoils of the territories of Spain would make provision.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *Plans and Preparations*



WHEN the summer of 1806 was well under way it was plain to Burr that his hope of deluding England into advancing money for his project must be abandoned; likewise the failure of the imposture tried on Yrujo no longer admitted of doubt. The only ray of consolation came from the far West where the Spaniards were reported to be encroaching on American soil. The cry of war again rang through the country; and it soon became known that specific orders had been sent to General Wilkinson to drive the enemy beyond the Sabine at any cost—and that meant the beginning of the long-delayed struggle! The match for igniting the conflict was in the hands of General Wilkinson—would he apply it? Both Dayton and Burr were doubtful. Whether he would continue his part or desert it depended wholly on circumstances. They knew he would act for what appeared to be his own advantage, regardless of affiliations or oaths, regardless of traditions or friendships. They had from their intimate association with him learned his weaknesses, and it was only by pandering to them that they hoped to retain his allegiance. He had written rarely, had raised objections, and had made conditions which were seemingly hard to overcome. He had sent a letter to Burr in October, 1805, which was “deemed very silly”; and finally another dated May

13th which Burr alleged that he destroyed at Wilkinson's request. The General was at the moment dispatching troops to the Sabine frontier and expecting to be ordered thither himself. That he would there precipitate—legitimately or otherwise—the conflict was the anxious hope of the leading conspirators, who now proceeded to alarm him for his office, which the President was on the verge of assigning to another, and to beguile him with fictions as to the means and assistance which were expected. All the false batteries of Burr and Dayton were trained on Wilkinson's position. Flagrant as the procedure was, they had gone too far to retreat. To the General Dayton wrote briefly, and his nephew, Peter V. Ogden, was intrusted with the letter, which was dated July 24th:

"It is now well ascertained that you are to be displaced in next session. Jefferson will affect to yield reluctantly to the public sentiment, but yield he will. Prepare yourself, therefore, for it. You know the rest. You are not a man to despair, or even despond, especially when such prospects offer in another quarter. Are you ready? Are your numerous associates ready? Wealth and glory! Louisiana and Mexico! I shall have time to receive a letter from you before I set out for Ohio—OHIO."

With Ogden went Samuel Swartwout, the younger brother of Robert, marshal of New York, who bore a letter from Burr to Wilkinson, which is celebrated as being the key to the conspiracy. Its date was July 29th. The original version of it will never be known, as it was altered and deciphered in various ways by Wilkinson, who, four months after its receipt, audaciously said to Jefferson, "I have not yet taken time to

render [it] to my satisfaction."<sup>1</sup> Such an admission was rendered more astonishing by his subsequent false swearing concerning it at Richmond. The famous document, as it is generally accepted, reads as follows:—

“Your letter, postmarked thirteenth May, is received. At length I have obtained funds, and have actually commenced. The Eastern detachments, from different points and under different pretences, will rendezvous on the Ohio first of November. Everything internal and external favors our views. Naval protection of England is secured. Truxton is going to Jamaica to arrange with the admiral on that station. It will meet us at the Mississippi. England, a navy of the United States, are ready to join, and final orders are given to my friends and followers. It will be a host of choice spirits. Wilkinson shall be second to Burr only; Wilkinson shall dictate the rank and promotion of his officers. Burr will proceed westward first August, never to return. With him goes his daughter; her husband will follow in October, with a corps of worthies. Send forthwith an intelligent and confidential friend with whom Burr may confer; he shall return immediately with further interesting details; this is essential to concert and harmony of movement. Send a list of all persons known to Wilkinson west of the mountains who could be useful, with a note delineating their characters. By your messenger send me four or five commissions of your officers, which you can borrow under any pretence you please; they shall be returned faithfully. Already are orders given to the contractor to forward six months’ provisions to points Wilkinson may name; this shall not be used until the last moment, and then under proper injunctions. Our object, my dear friend, is brought to a point so long desired. Burr guarantees the result with his life and honor, with the lives and honor and the fortunes of hundreds, the best blood of our country. Burr’s plan of operation is to move down

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson to Jefferson, Feb. 17, 1807; Letters in Relation.

rapidly from the Falls, on the fifteenth of November, with the first five hundred or a thousand men, in light boats now constructing for that purpose; to be at Natchez between the fifth and fifteenth of December, there to meet you; there to determine whether it will be expedient in the first instance to seize on or pass by Baton Rouge. On receipt of this send Burr an answer. Draw on Burr for all expenses, etc. The people of the country to which we are going are prepared to receive us; their agents, now with Burr, say that if we will protect their religion, and will not subject them to a foreign Power, that in three weeks all will be settled. The gods invite us to glory and fortune; it remains to be seen whether we deserve the boon. The bearer of this goes express to you. He is a man of inviolable honor and perfect discretion, formed to execute rather than project, capable of relating facts with fidelity, and incapable of relating them otherwise; he is thoroughly informed of the plans and intentions of Burr, and will disclose to you as far as you require, and no further. He has imbibed a reverence for your character, and may be embarrassed in your presence; put him at ease, and he will satisfy you."

This letter has been grossly misinterpreted. With all Burr's misrepresentations there is not the faintest hint that New Orleans was to be sacrificed; no allusion to a convention which was to be called for the purpose of declaring the independence of the Western States—a point which had borne great weight in the Spanish and English intrigues;—but we are told plainly that an attack was to be made on the Spanish possessions, possibly beginning with West Florida at Baton Rouge. If policy dictated, which Wilkinson was to decide, that Baton Rouge should remain unmolested, they would pass on—and to no other place than Mexico. "The people of the country to which we are going are prepared to receive us; their agents, now with Burr, say

that if we will protect their religion, and will not subject them to a foreign power, that in three weeks all will be settled." There had been Spanish agents with Burr, and one Fernandez had contracted in Philadelphia for a quantity of type destined for Mexico and cast for the Spanish language.<sup>1</sup> And we shall see that there were other Mexicans interested in the cause. It was only in the matter of his resources that Burr attempted deception.

Toward the end of July, Ogden and Swartwout started on their journey. A little later Bollman sailed for New Orleans bearing a duplicate of Burr's letter to Wilkinson, which the General received in due season. The first week in August, Burr—accompanied by his daughter, a Colonel De Pestre, who had suffered in the French Revolution, and who now lived in New Jersey, and a few friends and servants—followed Ogden and Swartwout over the Alleghanies. While stopping in Pittsburg, August 22d, Burr and De Pestre visited Colonel George Morgan, who resided near Cannonsburg, fifteen miles distant; there, during the progress of the dinner, Burr talked volubly. The Morgans afterwards testified that he observed that with two hundred men the President and Congress could be driven into the Potomac; that with five hundred New York City might be taken; and also, they admitted, averred in a jocular way that a "separation of the States must ensue as a natural consequence in four or five years."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Duane to Jefferson, December 8, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter's *Trial of Burr*, i., 497.

Apart from the utter nonsense of the first two propositions—which no sane man could have seriously uttered—a natural separation of the States in the course of time was not in harmony with Burr's precipitate measures. When Burr had gone, Colonel Morgan invited the Chief-Justice of Pennsylvania, Presley Neville, and Samuel Roberts to hear his account of the meeting with the ex-Vice-President. The two latter wrote conjointly to Madison that "To give a correct written statement of these conversations would perhaps be as unnecessary as it would be difficult. . . . Indeed, according to our informants, much more was to be calculated from the *manner* in which things were said, and hints given, than from the words used." While predicting the separation of the States in the course of four or five years, Burr also spoke of a wide field about to be opened for talented and military men.<sup>1</sup> The Morgans forgot to relate this fact at Richmond.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, George Morgan, in a letter to the President in January, 1807, after referring to the incident of the above meeting in which "I and my sons had opened to them [Neville and Roberts] our opinions of Colonel

<sup>1</sup>Neville and Roberts to Madison, October 7, 1806; Letters in Relation.

<sup>2</sup>The Morgans went out of their way to show the President that they were his humble servants. When the trial was over at Richmond they returned through Washington and left a note at the White House: "The three Morgans of Morganza have, from respect for Mr. Jefferson, called at his residence although knowing him to be from the city." It may be interesting to note that this family had once attempted to found a colony at New Madrid, a site opposite the mouth of the Ohio, under the ægis of the Spanish Crown; and had been vainly pressing before Congress since 1784 a claim to lands in Indiana, said to have been bought of the Indians. (*Journal of Congress*, iv., 341.) Was it possible they had seized this opportunity to curry favor with Jefferson?

Burr's views,"<sup>1</sup> questioned the patriotism of Neville, soldier of the Revolution and leader of the forces sent by President Washington to quell the Pennsylvania riots. Neville had established a rendezvous for the "genteelly disaffected." Morgan likewise noted that it was said a former aide of his was frequently there; and that—

"a Mr. Spence or Spencer, of the American navy, has lately been with him [Neville], and declared the disaffection of every officer in it. Being too far advanced in life to take an active part in these inquiries, I leave them to my sons; who, I am happy to say, have imbibed the principles of their father and of Thomas Jefferson from the commencement of our revolutionary war to the present day."

Leaving Pittsburg, Burr and party continued to Belpré, and at the appointed time set foot on the island in the Ohio, where a most enthusiastic reception was tendered them. Blennerhassett, who had devoted his life to science and music, had been at last called into action by his failing fortune and maturing family. He had, apart from his island property, about thirty thousand dollars invested; but from this he derived so little income that he was always pressed for money. He was eager to reestablish himself by some bold stroke of speculation. Such an opportunity Burr at once presented in the purchase of the Washita lands, a Spanish grant to Baron Bastrop, in the heart of Louisiana—areas in time to be worth their millions. Moreover, beyond this positive investment was another and greater possibility. In the contingency of a war with Spain,

<sup>1</sup>Morgan to Jefferson, January 19, 1807; Letters in Relation.



which was deemed inevitable, from the position they should occupy on the frontier, the route was open to the wealth and empire of Mexico. Blennerhassett was captivated, borne away with the promise of things. Preparations were begun without delay; the last days of August found Burr and his associate in Marietta, where they purchased, through the firm of Dudley Woodbridge & Company, one hundred barrels of pork and let the contract to Colonel Barker—whose establishment was seven miles above the town on the Muskingum—for fifteen boats to be delivered the ninth of December. This fact alone explodes the oft-repeated statement that Burr planned to move down the Ohio by November 15th.<sup>1</sup>

During one of these visits to Marietta, early in September, Blennerhassett showed Woodbridge a map of Mexico, "stating its advantages, wealth, fertility, and healthiness," and asked him to join the expedition. Woodbridge inferred from this, he said at the trial,<sup>2</sup> that the enterprise was aimed at Mexico. Blennerhassett in his prison at Richmond, when told of this evidence, set down in his Journal, "He has not yet told all the truth—having suppressed my communication to him of our designs being unequivocally against Mexico."

The island became forthwith the center of multifarious activities. A kiln was erected for drying corn, which was ground into meal and made ready for shipment; goods were purchased; and the effects of the

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Adams, iii., 268.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter's *Trial*, i., 518.

household were packed in preparation for removal, for Mrs. Blennerhassett and the two sons were also going. Blennerhassett, in his enthusiasm, talked much of the expedition which was to make them all rich; and shortly there were many as enthusiastic as Blennerhassett himself.

"A number of young men," said a correspondent of Pittsburg, "inhabitants of this town, amounting to seven, have set out with an intention to join Colonel Burr in his expedition against Mexico, among whom is Morgan Neville, son of General Presley Neville, and it is said, with the knowledge and consent of his father. . . . Also Thomas Butler, son of the late Colonel Butler; Mr. Forward, printer and editor of the *Tree of Liberty*, and publisher of the United States laws by authority, after having made preparations was prevented from going by sickness. . . . General Neville has used his influence to promote it. Wilkins and his sons warmly advocated it."<sup>1</sup>

To this paragraph the editor of the *National Intelligencer* appended the following comment:

"From the above letter it would seem that some of the first characters in Pittsburg are implicated in the Burr conspiracy. But we cannot believe that they would ever engage in a treasonable plot against their country. Colonel Neville was a conspicuous character in our Revolutionary War—he was an aide to the Marquis de La Fayette and in every situation in which he was placed has discharged his trust with fidelity to his country and honor to himself. . . . Yet the sons of those men are said to be concerned, and that too with the knowledge of their fathers. If this be the case, we cannot believe any treason is contemplated. Men of tried worth and known patriotism would never tarnish their well-earned reputations and

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, January 27, 1807.

risk their all in an enterprise in which they have nothing to gain, and where their lives would be jeopardized."

Apart from the enlistment of recruits and manifold duties, Blennerhassett is credited with having contributed a series of articles to the *Ohio Gazette* setting forth the expediency of a separation of the Western from the Eastern States. By whomever written, the articles could hardly have been issued in the interest of the conspiracy. For what service was a cold, cogent piece of argumentation—whose conclusion was that in the course of years natural causes would sever the West from the rest of the Union—expected to render the project of Burr, which, from all indications, was not to undergo a period of incubation?

Meantime Burr had traveled many miles. September 4, 1806, he entered Cincinnati, and became the guest of John Smith. He remained there several days, talking much of his settlement on the Washita, of the threatening war, and of the expedition to Mexico. The intriguer next crossed the Ohio to Lexington, and then passed into Tennessee, stopping again with Andrew Jackson. The approaching Spanish war was on every tongue. Parton says, "Every militiaman in the West was furbishing his accoutrements and awaiting the summons to the field." At a public dinner given Burr in Nashville, September 27th, Jackson offered the old toast: "Millions for defense; not one cent for tribute."

Scarcely had the ex-Vice-President reached Lexington on his return when Jackson's proclamation of October 4th to the Tennessee militia appeared in print.

He stated that the menacing attitude of the Spanish forces "already encamped within the limits of our Government" required that the militia should be ready for instant duty. He recited that the enemy had captured several citizens of the United States; had cut down our flag in the Caddo nation; had compelled a party in the employ of the Government to return from exploring the Red River; "and had taken up an unjustifiable and insulting position east of the river Sabine, in the Territory of Orleans." War was regarded as all but begun. Jackson communicated to the President his willingness to serve the country, and those who have followed his career know what that willingness meant. Jefferson replied December 3d to this first volunteer for the Spanish war:<sup>1</sup>—

"Always a friend to peace, and believing it to promote eminently the happiness and prosperity of mankind, I am ever unwilling that it should be disturbed as long as the rights and interests of the nation can be preserved. But whenever hostile aggressions on these require a resort to war, we must meet our duty, and convince the world that we are just friends and brave enemies."

Jefferson chose still to philosophize, to remain non-committal; but to have been frank he ought to have said to Jackson that for the present all idea of war with Spain had been abandoned; that orders had gone forward to Wilkinson on the Sabine to remain absolutely on the defensive, and that he believed a truce had already been agreed upon by the contending armies.

<sup>1</sup>Jefferson to Jackson, December 3, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

The first week in October Burr met at Lexington Blennerhassett, Theodosia Alston and her husband. They had come away from the island, leaving it in the care of Mrs. Blennerhassett. Henceforth Lexington was to be the rendezvous, and there the organization was to be perfected. The purchase of the Bastrop lands was now effected.

While Louisiana was under the Spanish flag, Baron de Bastrop had secured the grant of a tract of land, comprising about one million acres, situated in what is now North Louisiana on the Washita (*Ouachita*) River. Three-fifths of this had been obtained by Colonel Charles Lynch of Kentucky; but there were still some outstanding debts against the grant which he could not meet. At this juncture Burr contracted to take the whole under the following stipulations: "Colonel Burr was to pay Edward Livingston," testified Lynch,<sup>1</sup> "the amount of my purchase; he also paid me four or five thousand dollars in money, and was to take up certain paper which I valued at thirty thousand dollars more." The deeds were recorded in Lexington, and now in truth a long step forward in the programme had been made.

The possession of the Washita lands was a matter of secondary importance, and to be made use of only in case of emergency. Should the Government suspect them in their designs on Mexico, they would draw the cloak of settler about themselves; should the Spaniards drive them back, they were citizens of a Republic capable of defending them. It was above all something tan-

<sup>1</sup>Evidence of Colonel Lynch, *Annals of Congress*, 1807-08, p. 657.

gible: to the farmer, wide bottom lands with a rich market in New Orleans; to the trader, unknown tribes of Indians; to the daring, unexplored forests; to the adventurers, a rendezvous bordering the El Dorados of the Spanish provinces, whence they might sally when occasion offered. Glittering possibilities!

Recruits were now daily added to the list, and all attempts to disguise the purpose of the associates abandoned. "The impression," says Putnam,<sup>1</sup> "to some extent prevailed that Burr's movement and purposes had some sanction of the general Government, and that in so far as they were directed against the crafty enemies of the Western settlements they deserved to meet with coöperation." According to Jefferson, Burr would approach men, propose his scheme, and, if they did not care to engage unless the Government approved, he would show a forged letter purporting to be from Dearborn, which countenanced the expedition, and add that because of the President's absence he had not sanctioned it.<sup>2</sup> In a letter of January 3, 1807, to Wilkinson Jefferson said that persons had been enlisted with the "express assurance that the projected enterprise was against Mexico, and secretly authorized by this Government. Many expressly enlisted in the name of the United States."<sup>3</sup> That statement approximated the truth, if indeed it were not wholly true. Calculating on war, Burr knew the expedition would be countenanced; or, if peace ensued, Government might over-

<sup>1</sup>Putnam's *History of Middle Tennessee*, p. 581.

<sup>2</sup>Jefferson to Hay, June 5, 1807; Jefferson MSS.

<sup>3</sup>Jefferson to Wilkinson, January 3, 1807; *Annals of Congress*, 1807-08, p. 580.

look the preparations as in the case of Miranda. Says Perkins in his *Annals of the West*, "It appears that he [Burr] meant to invade Mexico, whether war or peace ensued between Spain and the United States." Graham, the Government's agent, who followed Burr southward, also bore witness to this purpose in the people, the following interview with Burr taking place at Natchez :<sup>1</sup>—

"I mentioned to Colonel Burr that I had heard in the Western country of a considerable number of men, perhaps two thousand, being collected for the purpose of invading Mexico. His reply was that he supposed that event was in the case of war with Spain. I told him no, that I had not understood it as depending on that condition."

Had Burr at that moment been confronted with his three maps,<sup>2</sup> left in the possession of Dr. Cummins, he would have been put to some confusion to explain upon what contingency he had calculated to lead his expedition to Mexico. There is no hushing such clamorous witnesses, and Burr must have confessed that he had counted primarily on Wilkinson and war, and finally on the silent acquiescence of the authorities. The secret of these maps in broad outline is this: that nothing less than the Empire of Spain in North America was at stake. One map shows that Empire stretching away to the Californias and to the Isthmus; the second is an admiralty chart of the Gulf coast of that country, indicating inlets, islands, and depths, which could have been of service only to a sea expedition;

<sup>1</sup>Testimony of John Graham, *Annals of Congress*, 1807-08, p. 490.

<sup>2</sup>Consult maps in the possession of Mrs. T. C. Wordin.

the third (here reproduced) tells its tale in the detailed topographical description of the region between Vera Cruz and Mexico City! Wilkinson, Adair, Truxton, and others confessed that Vera Cruz was the objective point of the sea expedition—the maps reinforce them. Had Burr's project gone forward, the world might have been treated to a spectacle in some of its aspects recalling the story of Cortez. For was not Burr to profit by internal dissensions to conquer the land where for three centuries the Spaniards had ruled as tyrants? And were not the men he hoped to lead of that rare breed known as *adelantados* and *conquistadores*—adventurers and filibusters?

The absorbing plan of invading the Spanish possessions was to be determined by force and opportunity. The idea of penetrating the neighboring territories, of making conquests of them, was in the air of the time, and not due in the remotest sense to the influence of Burr. He strove merely for its embodiment. Though he failed, history emphatically shows that his plans were opportune, and that their wreck was due to influences he had failed properly to estimate, and chiefly to the conduct of James Wilkinson. The Spaniards believed the conspiracy to have had a continuous existence, crediting it with the revolutionizing of West Florida in 1810, and a little later with having served as the inspiration for the Gutierrez-Magee Expedition,<sup>1</sup> which wrought such irremediable destruction in the Province of Texas, and which had set out with such

<sup>1</sup>See *Texas Historical Quarterly* for January, 1901: "The First Period of the Gutierrez-Magee Expedition."



high hopes of coöperating in the revolution which raged beyond the Rio Grande. It was in the opening year of our second war with Great Britain that—despite the fact that there was room in the army for all warlike characters—adventurers and revolutionists to the number of five hundred gathered along the Louisiana frontier and in the Neutral Ground, marched across Texas, annihilated three royalist armies, and held the province until dissensions prepared them for destruction. That Burr planned, in case of necessity, to make a “neutral ground” of his Bastrop lands scarcely admits of doubt; many of the followers of Magee had been his loyal partisans; and those who joined in the filibustering enterprises which swept westward for the next half century were his disciples.

Pursuing his tactics Burr wrote to Governor Harrison with the evident intention of exciting him, as he had Jackson, to issue a proclamation to the militia. To keep the aggression of the enemy before the people was to raise higher their passions.

“By the hands of my friend and relative, Major Westcott,” he said under date of October 24th, “you will receive a newspaper containing the orders lately issued by General Jackson to the militia of West Tennessee, being the division under his command. It occurred to me that you might deem something similar to be addressed to the militia of Indiana not inexpedient at this moment, and that the perusal of this production might be acceptable. All reflecting men consider a war with Spain to be inevitable; in such an event, I think you would not be at ease as an idle spectator. If it should be my lot to be employed, which there is reason to expect,

it would be my highest gratification to be associated with you.”<sup>1</sup>

As yet everything was going well; not only were boats being built, provisions being gathered, and recruits being prepared, but fate even seemed to declare for Burr. Every day brought more warlike tidings from the Sabine; newer encroachments and insults of the foe, and greater prospect of a violent clash between the American and Spanish armies which now stood facing each other across the Arroyo Hondo. It is plain from his letter to Governor Harrison that Burr momentarily expected Wilkinson to redeem his pledge that a war could and would be brought about. Upon the receipt of such news Burr's banner would be raised, and Harrison, Davis Floyd, Adair, and Jackson would each muster a regiment for an independent army destined for Mexico.

October 6th, two days after the appearance of Jackson's proclamation, a mass meeting of the citizens of Wood County, Virginia, under whose jurisdiction was Blennerhassett's island, condemned the “apparently hostile movements and designs of a certain character [Burr].” Resolutions were passed expressing their attachment to the President of the United States; and it was ordered that a corps of militia should be raised to act in case of emergency.<sup>2</sup>

Blennerhassett was absent in Kentucky, having gone there with the Alstons in the furtherance of the conspiracy, when these hostile expressions were uttered.

<sup>1</sup>Clark's *Proofs*, Ap., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>*Moniteur de la Louisiane*, December 31, 1806.

His absence, however, did not deter the boisterous militiamen from threatening a reprisal upon the island. Mrs. Blennerhassett became uneasy and sent her gardener, Peter Taylor, in search of her husband. October 20th he set out. On his way he stopped in Cincinnati to inquire of Senator John Smith the whereabouts of Blennerhassett. Smith, having become alarmed at the malignant rumors in circulation, seized the opportunity to send a note to Burr demanding an explanation.

"I was greatly surprised and really hurt by the unusual tenor of your letter of the 23d," Burr vouchsafed in answer to the Senator,<sup>1</sup> "and I hasten to reply to it, as well for your satisfaction as my own. If there exists any design to separate the Western from the Eastern States, I am totally ignorant of it. I never harbored or expressed any such intention to any one, nor did any person ever intimate such design to me."

From Cincinnati Taylor rode to Lexington, where, according to his own story, he saw Burr for the first time, and opened his acquaintance with the warning, "If you come up our way, the people will shoot you." Taylor's account of this meeting is sufficient to discredit him utterly. On the other hand, it is plain from his evidence that Blennerhassett had told him what was reserved for those in the innermost circle of the associates. They were "going to take Mexico, one of the finest and richest places in the whole world."

"Colonel Burr would be the King of Mexico, and Mrs. Alston, daughter of Colonel Burr, was to be Queen of Mexico, whenever Colonel Burr died. He said that

<sup>1</sup>Burr to Smith, October 26, 1806; *Senate Reports*, p. 33.

Colonel Burr had made fortunes for many in his time, but none for himself; but now he was going to make something for himself. He said that he had a great many friends in the Spanish territory; no less than 2,000 Roman Catholic priests were engaged, and that all their friends too would join, if once he could get to them; that the Spaniards, like the French, had got dissatisfied with their government, and wanted to swap it."

The inhabitants of the Spanish colonies were indeed tired of their Government. This was so manifestly the case in West Florida that even the faint-hearted Claiborne thought there would be no difficulty in acquiring the territory. "A great majority of the people of the Baton Rouge settlement," he said, March 3, 1806, to Jefferson, "are well affected to the United States, and anxious for a change of government."<sup>1</sup> The history of the subversion of the Spanish rule in Mexico adds most effective weight to this testimony. The priests were the agitators and the leaders in the terrible revolt which began in September, 1810, and which was to end with Mexican freedom. Had Burr been able to unite the elements in opposition to the foreigner in Mexico, then indeed might he have been king; and Wilkinson's taunt in a letter to Jefferson concerning Burr's overrunning of Mexico—that it would receive a new master in the place of promised liberty—would have been full of significance.

The news reported by Mrs. Blennerhassett was of sufficient gravity to call her husband away from the little group of revolutionists—already diminished by the return of the Alston family to South Carolina—

<sup>1</sup>Claiborne's Journal, p. 77.

living in the house of John Jourdan in the town of Lexington. Also De Pestre had taken leave of Burr, and the rest to bear reports to those who remained in the East, and to draw the blindfold tighter around the eyes of Yrujo. He was to pretend that the revolutionizing of the States was progressing rapidly, and to assure the Marquis that the report that Mexico was to be invaded had been circulated to hide the main design. But before De Pestre had reached his destination the Spanish Minister wrote his Government a long dispatch on the subject:<sup>1</sup>—

“It is indubitable that Colonel Burr and his subordinates are carrying out their plan. The partial discovery of their intentions instead of deterring has only confirmed them in the revolution, whose success alone can save them. Some of his associates at this place and at New York are going to meet him, in spite of the fact that the newspapers already comment on his enterprise. It seems to me to be his intention to profit by the hostile appearance on the Sabine to arm his friends preliminary to the rupture with Spain. I am confirmed in this opinion by a proclamation from the hand of one General Jackson of Kentucky, in which he proposed the organization of the militia to chastise the insulting Spaniards.”

So ignorant was Yrujo of the real posture of affairs in the West, he could not conceive that such a proclamation truly betokened patriotism; it was to him a mere subterfuge, for he had been accustomed, and the conspirators had fostered his predilection, to think of the Westerners as openly hostile to the Union. It never occurred to Yrujo—the proposition was too absurd—that he had been duped in order that an army,

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, November 10, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

marshaled for the conquest of his Sovereign's territories, might take things by surprise.

Burr's force was to consist of five hundred men, chiefly from New York, who were to rendezvous at Marietta. Then, continued Yrujo:

"Colonel Burr will go down with them under the pretext of establishing them on a great land purchase he is supposed to have made. In passing Cincinnati they expect to seize five thousand stand of arms which the Government deposited there at the time of its difference with us about the navigation of the Mississippi. After thus dropping the mask, this armed troop will follow down the course of the Mississippi. Colonel Burr will remain at Natchez till the Assembly of New Orleans has met, which will happen at once; and in this meeting (junta) they will declare the independence of the Western States, and will invite Burr to place himself at the head of their Government. He will accept the offer, will descend to New Orleans, and will set to work, clothed in a character which the people will have given him. I understand that Colonel Burr has already written the declaration of independence, and that it is couched in the same terms that the States adopted in theirs against Great Britain. This circumstance is the more notable inasmuch as the actual President was the person who drew it up in 1776. When Burr made the project of acting in agreement with England and seizing the Floridas, he expected to master them with troops that should accompany him from Baton Rouge. Although I am assured that this project is abandoned, and that, on the contrary, he wishes to live on good terms with Spain, I have written to Governor Folch of West Florida to be on his guard; and although I am persuaded that, by means of Governor Folch's connection with General Wilkinson, he must be perfectly informed of the state of things and of Burr's intentions, I shall write to-day or to-morrow another letter to the Governor of Baton Rouge to be on the alert."

It is puzzling that Yrujo should not have known

that Wilkinson's term of pensioner had expired. Had he been aware of this fact his anxiety for the safety of the southern provinces might justly have increased, although he believed the governors in that quarter to be well informed of the course of events through the press of New Orleans and Natchez. His perplexity was indeed augmented through a letter from Burr which De Pestre delivered about November 27, 1806, preparatory to his report:<sup>1</sup>—

"About eight days ago," said Yrujo to Cevallos, December 4th, "a former French officer, one of Burr's partisans, presented himself here; he is just from Kentucky in search of various things needful to the enterprise. . . . This officer brought me a letter of recommendation from Burr, in which he said simply that the bearer, who had recently been in the Western States, could give me information about them to satisfy my curiosity. The date of this letter was Lexington, October 25th."

Yrujo was assured that all was going well with Burr's affairs, and that by December 5th the adventurers from all parts would concentrate at Marietta. The body of the message ran as follows:

"He also told me, on the part of the Colonel, that I should soon hear that it was his intention to attack Mexico, but that I was not to believe such rumors; that on the contrary his plans were limited to the emancipation of the Western States, and that it was necessary to circulate this rumor in order to hide the true design of his armaments and of the assemblages of men which could no longer be concealed; that Upper and Lower Louisiana, the States of Tennessee and Ohio, stood ready and ripe for his plans, but that the State of Kentucky was

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, December 4, 1806; MSS. Spanish Archives.

much divided; and as this is the most important in numbers and population, an armed force must be procured strong enough to overawe the opposition. He added, on Burr's part, that as soon as the revolution should be complete, he would treat with Spain in regard to boundaries, and would conclude this affair to her entire satisfaction; meanwhile he wished me to write to the Governor of West Florida to diminish the burdens of Americans who navigated the Mobile River, and ask him, when the explosion should take place, to stop the courier or couriers which the friends of Government might dispatch, since it was desirable to delay the report of the happenings in the West."

However successful Burr had been in the earlier phase of his intrigue with Yrujo, nothing could have been plainer to the Minister than that the conspirators, who had now nothing to gain from his coöperation, were lulling him into drowsy security. Yrujo would have been blind indeed had he not discovered that the Westerners were massing, not to overawe Kentucky, but to take for themselves certain properties which were destined to belong a little longer to Carlos IV. Yrujo confessed that Burr in sending him this officer had "inspired him with the liveliest apprehensions." And he renewed his warnings to the officers in Florida, Texas, and Mexico.

After his interview with Yrujo, De Pestre went to New York, where he met that contingent which was to have gone round by sea to New Orleans. But everything was now in confusion because of the President's denunciation of the enterprise through his Proclamation of November 27th.<sup>1</sup> Still, hope of ultimate suc-

<sup>1</sup>See p. 196.



cess was not abandoned, and De Pestre returned in a fortnight to Philadelphia, and once more called upon Yrujo, to whom he related that Swartwout, Dr. Erwin, Colonel Smith, and Captain Lewis of the merchant-ship *Emperor* would soon set off for New Orleans. De Pestre further stated:<sup>1</sup>—

“that the youths enlisted to serve as officers should set out as soon as possible for their posts. These, my informant told me, are different. Some two or three of them, the quickest and keenest, go to Washington to observe the movements of Government, to keep their friends in good disposition, and to dispatch expresses with news of any important disposition or occurrence. Three go to Norfolk to make some dispatch of provisions. A good number of them will go direct to Charleston to take command as officers, and see to the embarkation of the numerous recruits whom Colonel Burr’s son-in-law has raised in South Carolina. He himself will then have returned there from Kentucky, and will embark with them for New Orleans. The rest will embark directly for that city from New York.”

This time the Marquis plied De Pestre with such questions as, Why, if the separation of the States is the object, was it necessary to prepare such quantities of provisions? and Why the State of Kentucky had become obstinate? It appears from Yrujo’s account that De Pestre was almost driven from his ground. Indeed, he was taunted for his dissembling. Blennerhassett gave it on the authority of the Frenchman—who related the whole of the circumstances to him while at Richmond—that Yrujo “pierced the cobweb tissue of Burr’s intrigues with him at a single glance.”

<sup>1</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, December 16, 1805; MSS. Spanish Archives.

"He assured De Pestre," the Journal records,<sup>1</sup> "that had Burr opened his designs with frankness, and really projected a severance of the Union, and nothing hostile to the Spanish provinces, he, Burr, might have had an easy resort to the Spanish treasury and its arsenals. But Yrujo laughed at the awkwardness with which Burr endeavored to mask his designs on Mexico."

Such a moment of satisfaction Yrujo could not have enjoyed. It was not until De Pestre came on the stage that the Marquis realized how thoroughly he had been entrapped. He was now convinced that Burr planned a descent upon Mexico, and realized that the only barrier which stood between the adventurer and his goal was Wilkinson. So he wrote with the deepest complacency some weeks later that Spain had saved herself and the United States by pensioning Wilkinson, who had entered into Burr's design for the division of the Union, but rebelled at his plan for the conquest of Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

While Yrujo was enjoying this special confidence of the associates, the stories of the conspiracy which were already rife in the States spread naturally into the very provinces the Spanish Minister was most exercised about. Some project had been ascribed to Burr as early as July, 1805, and since that date the Spanish governors had not been lacking information from Yrujo, from the press of the States, and from local connections. Although Yrujo knew Burr to be at the head of the project, with the ostensible design of

<sup>1</sup>*Blennerhassett Papers*, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup>Yrujo to Cevallos, January 28, 1807; MSS. Spanish Archives.

disrupting the Union, the administrators in the provinces of Don Carlos thought the movement directed by the Government of the United States, whose object was solely the extension of boundaries. Grand Pré, stationed at Baton Rouge, had become alarmed, and wrote Claiborne as early as April 1, 1806, that he understood hostile preparations against his province were making in Mississippi. Claiborne replied, "Your Excellency's letter of the first instant, has been received, and to quiet your apprehensions as far as is in my power, I hasten to assure you that I have never before heard of the hostile preparations which you seem to think are on foot in the Mississippi Territory."<sup>1</sup> But Claiborne had forgotten that he had said in a dispatch to Washington that West Florida was ready to revolt, and that hostile armaments were organizing. Kemper—one of the filibustering brothers of that name in Mississippi—bore witness to that when he said that Burr's corps, which were forming in that Territory, meant to attack Baton Rouge; and Wilkinson likewise testified to the open hostility of the Territory under Meade, the latter having expressed the wish that the Spanish cavalry would intercept the General on his ride to the frontier in September, "because if this did not happen we should have no war. The same man," said Wilkinson, "before I reached Natchez actually talked of attacking Baton Rouge."<sup>2</sup> Early in the fall Vicente Folch, Governor of West Florida, was advised of the scheme and of the violent disposition of his neighbors; and imme-

<sup>1</sup>Claiborne to Grand Pré, April 8, 1806; Journal, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Wilkinson to John Smith, Jefferson MSS.

diately hurried information to Mexico. Again, on October 1st, he sent a message to the Viceroy:—

“You have already been informed of the project to revolutionize Mexico. This enterprise has not been lost sight of, and seems to be stronger than ever. According to the plan, if the weather permits, in February or March ten thousand Kentuckians, three thousand regular troops, eight or ten thousand militia from Louisiana, who will be forced to go, will march for Mexico. They will raise a corps of five thousand blacks, who will be taken from the plantations and declared free. This will make an army of from twenty-eight to thirty thousand men; five thousand will be reserved for the city of New Orleans. Baton Rouge and Pensacola will probably be the first taken. . . . After that, Natchitoches will be the point for the reunion. Part of the army will be embarked to land at the Rio Grande. The pretext for this expedition is afforded by the presence of the Spanish troops at Adayes. Congress will act only on the defensive, but if once these troops are united they will march toward Mexico with great proclamations.”

Without doubt Folch had grains of truth with his chaff; but here again Burr's project was swallowed up in the larger purpose attributed to the nation. That the movement was directed wholly against Spain was indubitable. There was not a hint nor even a suspicion that the West, according to Yrujo's advices, was first to be revolutionized. To those viewing the situation at short range his disclosures appeared but idle prophecy; of national aggressiveness, on the other hand, there were unmistakable signs, and its direction was undoubted.

<sup>1</sup>Folch to Iturrigaray, October 1, 1806; MSS. Mexican Archives.

Amid all these eddying reports and rumors, the Government at Washington, harassed by Pitt, teased by Napoleon, and defied by Godoy, labored heedless of the gathering storm on a near horizon. It was toward the end of October before the Administration thought the matter of the conspiracy worth its attention. Various letters and the notice of the organization of the Wood County militia had been received, but there was nothing tangible in any of the communications. October 13th one James Taylor wrote to Madison from Kentucky that the scheme in question was to seize the Congress lands and to separate the States; that Blennerhassett, who had fled to this country, was reported to have written the articles signed "Querist";<sup>1</sup> that Woodbridge & Company of Marietta were building ten gunboats, or strong vessels resembling them, at a navy yard seven miles up the Muskingum.<sup>2</sup> Long before this, however, Jefferson had been warned that a conspiracy was on foot in the West and that Burr was its master-spirit. As early as January 10, 1806, Joseph H. Daviess, prosecuting-attorney for the Federal District of Kentucky, wrote the President a private letter denouncing the Spanish pensioners, and declaring that Burr's object was to effect "a separation of the Union in favor of Spain."

"This plot is laid wider than you imagine," he asserted by way of a general warning. "Mention the subject to no one from the Western country, however high in office he may be. Some of them are deeply tainted with this treason. I hate duplicity of expression; but on this

<sup>1</sup>See p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Taylor to Madison, October 13, 1806; Madison MSS.

subject I am not authorized to be explicit, nor is it necessary. You will dispatch some fit person into the Orleans country to inquire.”<sup>1</sup>

Daviess knew nothing “explicit,” nor was he in better position eleven months later when he swore out a process against Burr. Notwithstanding, from the date of his first note until Burr was afloat upon the Mississippi, he kept up a constant stream of denunciations. In a second letter, one month from the first, he recited the itinerary of Burr during his trip through the West in 1805; named the men with whom he associated, dwelling particularly on his connection with Wilkinson and the Senator from Ohio. On March 5th he declared that he would raise money and pursue the plot at his own expense.<sup>2</sup> The President had already written him asking for more information.<sup>3</sup> In pursuit of this, May 7th found the district-attorney at St. Louis, where he remained several days scrutinizing Wilkinson’s conduct with a view to fathoming the conspiracy.<sup>4</sup> Once the General took up a map and, tapping the region about New Mexico, said, “Had Burr been President we should have had all this country before now.” To Madison Daviess confided at this stage that a war with Spain was the first step in the programme, and that this was considered inevitable. “The Mexican provinces, the American possessions on the Mississippi, and the Floridas are in view.” Later he saw four

<sup>1</sup>*View of the President’s Conduct* (p. 10), by J. H. Daviess, 1807.

<sup>2</sup>*View of the President’s Conduct*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>*View*, etc., p. 14. *Clark’s Proofs*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup>*Smith’s History of Kentucky*, p. 427.

sides to the plot: one for the Spanish Minister, in New Orleans and the Western States; one for adventurers, in the conquest of Mexico; another for the multitude, in the Washita lands; and lastly one for Burr himself, aggrandizement.<sup>1</sup> But the Government was not driven by Daviess's wholesale charges to an investigation of the plot; nor were his communications even mentioned among the sources of information in the Cabinet Memoranda of October 22d, which Jefferson recorded in his own hand.<sup>2</sup>—

“During the last session of Congress, Colonel Burr who was here, finding no hope of being employed in any department of the government, opened himself confidentially to some persons on whom he thought he could rely, on a scheme of separating the Western from the Atlantic States, and erecting the former into an independent confederacy. He had before made a tour of those States, which had excited suspicions, as every motion does of such a Catalinarian character. Of his having made this proposition here we have information from General Eaton through Mr. Ely and Mr. Granger. He went off this spring to the western country. Of his movements on his way, information has come to the Secretary of State and myself from John Nicholson and Mr. Williams of the state of New York, respecting a Mr. Tyler; Colonel Morgan, Neville, and Roberts, near Pittsburg; and to other citizens through other channels and the newspapers. We are of opinion unanimously that confidential letters be written to the Governors of Ohio, Indiana, Mississippi, and New Orleans; to the district-attorneys of Kentucky, of Tennessee, of Louisiana, to have him strictly watched, and on his committing any overt act, to have him arrested and tried for treason, misdemeanor, or whatever other offence the act may amount

<sup>1</sup>*View*, etc., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Memoranda, October 22, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

to; and in like manner to arrest and try any of his followers committing acts against the laws. We think it proper also to order some of the gunboats up to Fort Adams to stop by force any passage of suspicious persons going down in force. General Wilkinson being expressly declared by Burr to Eaton to be engaged with him in this design as his lieutenant, or first in command, and suspicion of infidelity in Wilkinson being now become very general, a question is proposed what is proper to be done as to him on this account, as well as for his disobedience of orders received by him June 11 at St. Louis to descend with all practical despatch to New Orleans to mark out the site of certain defensive works there, and then repair to take command at Natchitoches, on which business he did not leave St. Louis till September. Consideration adjourned.

"October 24. It is agreed unanimously to call for Captains Preble and Decatur to repair to New Orleans, by land or by sea as they please, there to take command of the force on the water, and that the *Argus* and two gunboats from New York, three from Norfolk, and two from Charleston shall be ordered there, if on consultation between Mr. Gallatin and Mr. Smith the appropriations shall be found to enable us; that Preble shall, on consultation with Governor Claiborne, have great discretionary powers; that Graham shall be sent through Kentucky on Burr's trail, with discretionary powers to consult confidentially with the governors to arrest Burr if he has made himself liable. He is to have a commission of [Upper] Louisiana, and Dr. Browne is to be removed. Letters are to be written by post to Governor Claiborne, the Governor of Mississippi, and Colonel Freeman to be on their guard against any surprises of our posts or vessels by him. The question as to General Wilkinson postponed till Preble's departure, for future information.

"October 25. A mail arrived yesterday from the westward, and not one word is heard from that quarter of any movements of Colonel Burr. This total silence of the officers of the government, of the members of Congress, of the newspapers, proves he is committing no



overt act against the law. We therefore rescind the determination to send Preble, Decatur, the *Argus*, or the gunboats, and instead of them to send off the marines which are here to reinforce, or take place of, the garrison at New Orleans, with a view to Spanish operations; and instead of writing to the governors, etc., we send Graham on that route, with confidential authority to inquire into Burr's movements, put the Governors, etc., on their guard, to provide for his arrest if necessary, and to take on himself the government of [Upper] Louisiana. Letters are still to be written to Claiborne, Freeman, and the Governor of Mississippi to be on their guard."

The resolutions of the first two days indicate that the Cabinet saw possible danger in Burr's project; but the action of the third proves that they were loath, with their meagre information, to take any decisive steps. The fact that Wilkinson's derelictions were quietly passed over is only another illustration of the painful indecision which ruled at this time both President and advisers in every matter of importance. Burr's plot was subordinated to the threatening foreign complications; therefore one need express no astonishment at the rescinding of all vigorous measures against a conspiracy which, as yet, had taken no definite form, and which had been denounced only in the vaguest terms. It seemed quite sufficient to send John Graham, Secretary of the Orleans Territory, on Burr's path to inquire into his behavior, and to write letters of warning to the officials of the West.

But if the officials of the Western States, familiar with Burr's movements, were expecting a warning of any character it was to prepare to defend themselves

against the Castilians in force on their borders. Jackson had just issued his proclamation to the Tennessee militia, and Burr went from place to place applauded as the leader destined to scourge a foe whose insolence and aggressions had at last outworn the patience of a long-suffering people.

## CHAPTER V.

### *The Crisis on the Frontier*



WHEN James Monroe, Minister Plenipotentiary to England and Envoy Extraordinary to Spain, quitted Madrid for London, May 26, 1805, war with Spain appeared inevitable. The attempt to reach a settlement of the disputes between the two countries had utterly failed. With the United States now threatening to fall upon that part of the Empire which might otherwise escape the greed of the Dictator of Europe and the English merchants, the circle of Spain's enemies was complete; it was a situation from which there was no escape, and Manuel de Godoy, the Prince of Peace, looked resignedly ahead to wars and embroilments in the hope of finding relief.

The very day on which Monroe had his audience of leave with Carlos IV., May 22, 1805, Don Pedro Cevallos, Minister of State, discussed with Soler, Minister of Hacienda, the course the negotiations had taken. After canvassing each point which had been raised in the conferences with Monroe—admitting the justness of only one claim of the United States—the very important dispatch closed with this paragraph: “I send you this notice so that you may take what measures the service of the King and the security of his dominions demand, it being impossible to forecast the consequences which may follow the rupture of

negotiations.”<sup>1</sup> The matter was more pointedly put by Francisco Gil to the Viceroy of Mexico, José de Iturrigaray:<sup>2</sup>—

“The political situation with regard to the United States of America is darkly uncertain, because the negotiations which were undertaken with Mr. Monroe have been broken off on account of the fact that the claims he advanced were as ambitious and exorbitant as they were prejudicial to the rights of the Crown. The defenses of our possessions will, therefore, be looked to with the utmost care.”

A plan for the protection of Texas was speedily devised, and early in October, 1805, the posts of Bayou Pierre and Nana, to the east of the Sabine—reconnoitring stations mustering respectively forces of twenty and ten men—were occupied.<sup>3</sup> Behind these were Nacogdoches, Orcoquisac, and Trinidad, where the real struggle for the defense of the province would be made, while further in the interior were La Bahia, San Marcos, Refugio, and San Antonio de Bexar.<sup>4</sup> While these preparations show that a struggle was expected, half invited, the Americans were taking steps which promised no disappointment.

January 24, 1806, Major Porter, commanding Fort Claiborne at Natchitoches, received an order from the War Department which required that the officer in command at Nacogdoches should give assurance that no further inroads would be made to the east of the

<sup>1</sup>Real Cédulas, vol. cxcv.; MSS. Mexican Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Real Cédulas, vol. cxcv.; MSS. Mexican Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Gonzales to Rodriguez, October 16, 1805; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Salcedo to Cordero, October 8 and 25 (two letters), 1805; MSS. Bexar Archives.

Sabine, to which stream the Americans were to extend their patrols. Lieutenant Piatt with these instructions was sent to Nacogdoches. Rodriguez, the commander, replied that no aggression had been intended, but that he could not give the assurance demanded.<sup>1</sup> Piatt returned with this answer, and on the first of February Captain Turner with his command, which numbered sixty, was ordered to proceed to the neighborhood of Adayes, where he would fall in with a "stationary party of armed Spaniards" which was to be commanded to withdraw beyond the Sabine. They might go in peace if they would, but evacuate they must, even at the cost of blood. So ran the orders.<sup>2</sup>

On the fifth Turner arrived before the camp at Bayou Pierre near Adayes, where a mission had stood in the past century. Gonzales, the commanding officer, protested at the unwarranted invasion of his Sovereign's territory, but signed a written agreement to the effect that the troops of his Catholic Majesty which he commanded would be transported to the other side of the Sabine as soon as the horses were in condition to travel; or at furthest in six days.<sup>3</sup>

Now indeed the fear of invasion seized both sides. The Americans trembled for Louisiana; the air was rife with tales of Spanish intrigues, and there were evidences of deceit and treachery. Major Porter had but two hundred effective men to meet whatever emergency arose, while the enemy were said to number four

<sup>1</sup>Martin's *Louisiana*, ii., 63.

<sup>2</sup>*Messages and Reports of the United States Government*, 1806. Gayarré's *History of Louisiana*, iv., 137.

<sup>3</sup>*Messages and Reports of the United States Government*, 1806.

hundred, exclusive of Indians.<sup>1</sup> In reality the Spaniards were only fifty-one. But the permanent abandonment of the region in dispute was far from the purpose of Salcedo, Captain-General of the Internal Provinces of Mexico, who at once ordered to the front six hundred militia under Lieutenant-Colonel Herrera.<sup>2</sup> A little later he declared that the United States by sending troops across the Arroyo Hondo had been guilty of breaking the harmony existing between the two powers.

“Ever since France sold Louisiana to the United States,” he went on petulantly to Cordero,<sup>3</sup> “nothing has been left undone to extend the limits into the Spanish possessions of the Missouri (*Misuri*) and Arkansas (*Napertle*), and to secure the twenty-two leagues of land lying between the Arroyo Hondo and the Sabine, the former of which marks the boundary of Louisiana, as the Americans well know. They are also massing troops without question of expense to hold by force their spoils. They are also intriguing with the Indians, have built a storehouse at Natchitoches and have filled it with gifts for them. It has not been possible for us to oppose them in force, but in order to counteract their influence among the Indians I have dispatched expeditions to the various tribes, our dependencies—some to the far Northwest.”

In addition to the threatening situation in Texas, rumors of a graver nature reached the Captain-General of the Internal Provinces at Chihuahua. They were nothing less than premonitory warnings of the coming of Burr; and it is indeed astonishing to discover that thus early the officials of Mexico had received ac-

<sup>1</sup>Gayarré, iv., 137.

<sup>2</sup>Salcedo to Cordero, April 9, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Salcedo to Cordero, April 15, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

counts of the nature of his plot. Burr's designs were complicated with the attitude assumed by the United States Government in the matter of the extension of boundaries, and the complication confounded contemporaries, most of all the Spaniards. They saw the conspiracy only as an aggressive movement against their territories, organized as it were under the wing of the Government and with the plea of vindication of rights. But the Spaniards also thought they had rights, and prepared to defend them. April 21st Governor Cordero commanded that the various chiefs of Indian tribes of Texas should be notified of the menace of the United States, so that they might be vigilant.<sup>1</sup> By this, too, the Viceroy, who was at first inclined to ignore the movement, began to look seriously upon the crisis, and sent forward all the available troops.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile the Spanish soldiers who had lingered in New Orleans months beyond their allotted time—for no other purpose, some thought, than to create disaffection, or to be on the ground to seize the city by a *coup de main*—were ordered away. Among those who left sullen and defeated was the dictatorial intendant, Juan Ventura Morales, famous as the author of the closure of the entrepôt at New Orleans. February 15th, three days after Morales had departed, Marquis Casa Calvo, also under compulsion and bitterly protesting, set out for Pensacola. He had just returned to New Orleans from a four months' trip to Texas, where, to credit Rodriguez, he had advocated the precipitation of hos-

<sup>1</sup>Cordero to Viana, April 21, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Iturrigaray to Salcedo, April 28, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

tilities in the belief that Louisiana would espouse the cause of Spain.<sup>1</sup> Cordero and Salcedo thought him busy with carrying into effect his commission as territorial adjudicator, while Claiborne heard that he was tampering with the allegiance of the Indians; that he was spreading discontent, or indeed, that he had gone to command the Mexican army.<sup>2</sup> The nervous Governor of Louisiana rejoiced therefore at the President's determination to hasten the withdrawal of the Spaniards. Their expulsion, however, stirred up their brethren in West Florida. Governor Folch refused to permit the transmission of the United States mails through his territory, the fortifications of Mobile were strengthened, and emissaries were sent among the Choctaws. Claiborne became uneasy, and wrote the President that a respectable force was essential to the safety of New Orleans. As the summer wore on affairs calmed somewhat on the frontier, but there were too many provocations for the thought of peace. Spain had cast the die and was as determined to do nothing—her European position had materially changed for the worse—as when Monroe demanded his passports of Carlos IV. in May, 1805.

"On the fourth of July [1806]," says Parton, "there were not a thousand persons in the United States who did not think war with Spain inevitable, impending, begun!" War with Spain was to be waged not only that our rights might be vindicated, but also that the Mexicans might be free. It was in the West

<sup>1</sup>Rodriguez to Cordero, March 4, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Casa Calvo to Cordero, December 8, 1805; Salcedo to Cordero, January 1 and 28 (two letters), 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.



that this feeling reached its climax, and the sentiments pervading the celebrations of the Fourth of July may well be taken as indicative of their attitude. To know their attitude toward the Union, a war with Spain, the invasion of Mexico is to hold the key to the conspiracy. From the nature of things, a conspiracy with form and life must reflect the character of its adherents. Was there then in the West an element unfriendly to the Union? Was there one animated by revolutionary impulses which longed to expel the arrogant foreigner from the shores of America? The Westerners made reply in unequivocal language.

At a banquet in Cincinnati the following appropriate toast was drunk: "May party spirit be banished from this land, and freedom and a union of sentiment predominate; a determination to support our liberty and Constitution inviolate."<sup>1</sup> Among other toasts offered at Georgetown, Kentucky, were: "The people of the United States: may their union be lasting as time"; and, "Western America: one in principle and interest with the rest of the Union."<sup>2</sup> In a neighboring city: "The Mississippi and its waters—our highway to market: may its trade be free and uninterrupted as its current." Then drinking to Louisiana, our recent acquisition: "May the tree of liberty flourish on the ruins of despotism"; and, "May the Western country flourish, and the golden chain of the Union never break."<sup>3</sup> At Lexington they praised "The patriots who suffered in '76"; and, "Thomas Jefferson, President of

<sup>1</sup>*Western Spy*, July 8, 1806.

<sup>2</sup>*Palladium*, July 27, 1806.

<sup>3</sup>*Palladium*, July 10, 1806.

the United States." In St. Louis we find similar expressions of faith and confidence in the Constitution and the Republic. At a celebration given October 25th in honor of Lewis and Clark, the returning explorers of the far Northwest, these toasts were proposed: "The Territory of Louisiana—freedom without bloodshed: may her actions duly appreciate the blessing." Then, with three cheers: "The Federal Constitution: may the eagle of America convey it to the remotest parts of the globe; and whilst they read they can but admire." A third: "The memory of the illustrious Washington, father of America: may his guardian spirit still watch over us and prove a terror to the engines of tyranny." In New Orleans they toasted the following sentiment: "The ancient boundaries of Louisiana—republics never contract their limits." Claiborne was delighted with the celebration in his capital.

"On yesterday," he said to Dearborn in a dispatch of July 5, 1806, "the citizens of this place exhibited a degree of patriotism which afforded me pleasure. All the stores in the city were closed by order of the city council, and the inhabitants generally suspended their usual avocations. High mass was performed in the forenoon at the churches, and a Te Deum sung. At night a new tragedy called *Washington; or, the Liberty of the New World*, was performed and much applauded by the numerous audience, consisting for the most part of ancient Louisianians."<sup>1</sup>

Even the Creoles were enthusiastic and applauded the idea of liberty for the New World; and liberty for the New World, as they knew, could come only by the

<sup>1</sup>Claiborne to Dearborn, July 5, 1806; Journal, p. 201.

destruction of the power which had fettered it. Also the Mexican Association, or, more accurately, the Mexican Society, of New Orleans was enthusiastic in the agitation for war. "It had for its object," said Dr. Watkins, Mayor of New Orleans, "collecting information relative to the population and force of the interior provinces of New Spain which, in the event of war, might be useful to the United States." He further averred that the invasion of Mexico had always been counted upon in a war with the Dons.

The West, as it loved the Union hated Spain, and that hatred appeared to be of a nature which only war could appease. The war might be legitimate or otherwise—there were those who did not mean to ask questions. Perhaps this element and its most extravagant plan is represented in the communication published in several Western newspapers in the fall of 1805, over the signature of "A Kentucky Man":

"As to the Spaniards, we can pay ourselves. There are gentlemen now in this city from the westward, who will make contracts whenever Congress authorizes it to pay every just claim of our citizens upon them, and will engage to do it, free of any expense to the United States, and also, not to injure any private property in Mexico."

Evidently nothing less was meditated than the overrunning of Mexico, whose public domains or confiscated public properties would be seized for debts long overdue! The proposition was not so visionary as it appeared on its face, and cannot be overlooked

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, November 1, 1805.

in casting up the sum total of ideas which were eddying in the West.

In the midst of the war excitement, in the winter of 1805, Francisco de Miranda, a native of Caracas, landed in New York. As early as 1793 he had tried to draw the United States and Great Britain into a war for the liberation of his native country. Failing then, he went to the Continent, where he became a distinguished wanderer, taking high rank in the armies of both France and Russia. It was truly an auspicious time for him to revive his scheme of rebellion in Venezuela, for war between Spain and the United States appeared to be only a matter of days. Finding generous friends in New York, he soon had the *Leander* fitted out with arms and provisions, and February 2, 1806, sailed on his ill-fated voyage.

The part played by the Government in this affair is, to say the least, not above suspicion, for both Jefferson and Madison knew something of what was going on; but for us what is of most value in this connection is to know that the expedition was watched with the greatest interest throughout the Union, especially in the West. The newspapers of the time were full of Miranda, and the tone of the comment was most convincing. A single paragraph from the *Charleston Courier*, quoted in the *Orleans Gazette*, will suffice:<sup>1</sup>—

“The expedition under General Miranda, from a variety of circumstances, promises to be attended with success. The dissatisfaction of the people generally with the Spanish Government, and particularly the priests, who,

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, July 4, 1806.

by a late decree of the court of Madrid, are deprived of the principal parts of the revenues of the church, will induce them to seek a change of masters; to rid themselves at once of the most abject state of slavery and ignorance and from the fiend-like influence of the Prince of Peace. . . . What has the Spanish Government to oppose him [Miranda]? Nothing. The provinces are without troops, or at least they are not sufficient to drive the revolvers from their purposes. The mother country cannot assist them—she has soldiers but no ships—and if the means of transportation were found, the British fleet would intercept them. . . . The success of Miranda will open to the Americans a new field of enterprise; from the United States they must receive their supplies of goods and military stores, and the products which can be obtained in return will yield a good profit. . . . But, we hope, remembering our own emancipation, we shall give our aid to those who feel their rights, and have courage enough to assert them. . . . May the most brilliant success attend the standards of those who fight for the cause of rational liberty, and for the dignity of the human species.”

Such paragraphs need no discussion, but the fact that they were printed and reprinted in every journal of the West is worth remarking. Having been thus informed of Miranda's enterprise, the Westerners were on the alert for any news from Venezuela. All through the summer and fall that Burr and his associates were struggling to make headway with their expedition the newspapers were telling of Miranda's victories, and finally of the rumors of his defeat. When the report came that he had been beaten off, the West was loath to give credence to it, and the disappointment was keen when it came positively to be known that he had failed. There was not in all the West a word of disaffection.

In their toasts—and toasts were of far greater significance in that day than this—two ideas appear predominant: reverence for the Union and hatred for the symbols of despotism. Their sympathies, too, for Miranda betrayed unconsciously a love for the Constitution and a growing National spirit which was in six short years to force, in spite of the East and New England, the second war with Great Britain! And yet this was the region advertised as openly rebellious—the region Yrujo and Merry expected shortly to declare its independence. Could ignorance of conditions have been more dense?

By the end of June, 1806, there were in the province of Texas one thousand and seven soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The force on the frontier, however, never exceeded six hundred and ninety-seven men,<sup>2</sup> which was considered strong enough to sustain the King's pretensions in that quarter. Accordingly, in July, a body of troops under Viana once more hoisted the flag of Spain at Bayou Pierre. August 4th Viana wrote urgently to the commander of Nacogdoches for provisions, complaining that they had been four days without rations.<sup>3</sup> The straits of the quartermaster were much intensified by the arrival of Herrera with several companies of cavalry; while sickness spread through the camp, converting it into a wretched hospital. But the Americans held exaggerated ideas of the efficiency of the corps under Cordero and Herrera.

<sup>1</sup>Cordero to Salcedo, June 12, 1806; MSS. State of Texas Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Herrera to Salcedo, November 8, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

<sup>3</sup>Viana to Rodriguez, August 4, 1806; MSS. Bexar Archives.

The news of the recrossing of the Sabine by the Spaniards spread rapidly through the country, rousing the inhabitants to arms—for the hated enemy appeared once more as invaders. The Governor of Louisiana was at Concordia, near Natchez—having been granted a leave of absence to visit his home in Tennessee—when the intelligence reached him. August 17th he met Cowles Meade, the Acting-Governor of Mississippi Territory, at Natchez, and a joint proclamation was issued. The people were called upon to aid the regular troops in expelling the Spaniards from Bayou Pierre, if the orders of the War Department had not been revoked; they were to be put on a campaign footing, the militia of the Mississippi Territory being ready to march to the frontier or to defend New Orleans, as the circumstances might require. The continued absence of Wilkinson was remarked and regretted.<sup>1</sup> But Claiborne felt he had no time to lose. “Having heard that a considerable force of Spaniards [is] in the vicinity of Natchitoches,” he wrote the same day to Dr. John Watkins,<sup>2</sup> “I propose setting out to-morrow for the counties of Rapides and Natchitoches, for the purpose of putting the militia in the best possible state.”

Before Claiborne had started, a Pinckneyville correspondent of the *Orleans Gazette* reported that Lieutenant Smith had arrived from Natchitoches with orders for Colonel Kingsbury to march forward with all the troops at Fort Adams. Nine hundred men under the Governor of Texas, so the report ran, had

<sup>1</sup>Journal, p. 230. Claiborne's Correspondence, Orleans Territory, vol. iv., MSS. State Department Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, p. 228.

advanced to within twelve miles of Natchitoches, where they were met by a flag from Major Porter, demanding an explanation of this new encroachment; to which they answered that they meant to reoccupy their former positions. An engagement had therefore probably taken place, if the Spaniards persisted in their undertaking.<sup>1</sup> The reporter was not aware, however, that the commander at Natchitoches was bound by supplementary instructions from the head of the army, which forbade the enforcement of the orders from the Secretary of War. Wilkinson was already disposing of things to suit himself.

Claiborne entered at once into a sharp controversy with Herrera. On the twenty-sixth he complained of several acts of unfriendliness—the setting at liberty of runaway slaves, the capture of three Americans (Irwin, Shaw, and Brewster), and the invasion of the territory of the United States. Herrera did not deny the first two charges, but returned his demurrer to the third. At this juncture he fell ill, and Claiborne courteously sent Dr. Hayward to attend him. The Governor, however, did not mean to suspend operations—he urged the fulfillment of the instructions from Washington, which commanded that all foreign troops should be driven to the west of the Sabine. Colonel Cushing explained that this would be contrary to the mandate of Wilkinson; and thereupon the Governor gave vent to his suspicions in a letter to Meade: “My present impression is that ‘all is not right.’ I know not whom to censure, but it seems to me that there is wrong

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, August 22, 1806.



somewhere. Either the orders to Major Porter (which have been published) ought not to have been issued, or they should have been adhered to and supported.”<sup>1</sup> It was, indeed, hard for a layman to understand how even a general could set in abeyance the commands of his superior; there *was* wrong somewhere, but this was as near as the good-natured, honest Governor ever came to its discovery. The day he wrote Meade he addressed two letters quite free from suspicions to the War Department:

“The Spanish troops have made a retrograde movement,” he reported August 28th;<sup>2</sup> “they have advanced their main body to within seventeen miles of Natchitoches, and their patrols as far as the Bayou Funda [Arroyo Hondo], to which place it is contended the province of Texas extends (this bayou is about seven miles from Natchitoches); but within these few days past they have fallen back to the settlement of Bayou Pierre, about fifty or sixty miles distant from Natchitoches. Their numbers are conjectured to be 1,000, the greater part cavalry, and reinforcements are daily expected. They are amply supplied with beef cattle, but it is said a scarcity of bread is experienced. . . . I have found the Americans, who are settled in the frontier counties, devoted to their country, and solicitous to be called into service.”

The second letter, a week later, recounted as current report that the Spaniards at Bayou Pierre numbered 1200; that the Governor of Texas was approaching with three hundred regulars; that two regiments from Vera Cruz were to land at the mouth of the Trinity; and that the Viceroy and the Council of Mexico were alone responsible for the military movements, the Court

<sup>1</sup>Claiborne to Meade, September 9, 1806; Journal, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, p. 243.

of Spain having no part in it. It was mentioned that Colonel Cushing was restrained from acting on the offensive by Wilkinson's commands; that the Colonel in the meantime was making arrangements to take the field, while he (Claiborne) was preparing the militia.<sup>1</sup> After his experiences in the administration of the municipality of New Orleans, where he found only antagonisms and embittered factions, political and social, it gave him extreme pleasure, as he wrote Cushing, to note the enthusiasm of the people.<sup>2</sup> The unanimity with which they responded to the defense of the country was certainly gratifying to him and to those in the high places of the Government, who were in daily expectation of the herald of war.

The Cabinet early resigned itself to the situation. When the news of the expulsion of Gonzales reached Washington a meeting was held, the result of which the President reported to Dearborn, who was absent:—

“Six war vessels are to be kept before New Orleans,” ran the note; “three in Lake Pontchartrain. Blockhouses and other defenses are to be erected at suitable places on the defiles of New Orleans. The troops are to remain off the island on account of their health, but they are to be ready to march at notice. The militia of New Orleans, Tombigbee, and Natchez are to be put in the best possible condition; those at New Orleans to defend that city; those on the Tombigbee to seize Mobile or Pensacola, or follow if the Spanish troops from either of these threaten New Orleans. These orders are to be carried out with as little noise as possible.”<sup>3</sup>

While these were wholly defensive measures, the

<sup>1</sup>Journal, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup>Jefferson to Dearborn, April 26, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

state of mind of the Government is clearly reflected therein. If anything was left in doubt, this was shortly removed by the Executive. May 6, 1806, when the following orders went forward to General Wilkinson, the challenge was accepted, and it was for the administrators of Don Carlos in the New World to say whether the Floridas, Louisiana, Texas, and the Spanish Americas should become legitimate stakes of war.

"From recent information received from New Orleans and its vicinity," wrote the Secretary of War to General Wilkinson,<sup>1</sup> "the hostile views of the officers of his Catholic Majesty in that quarter have been so evident as to require the strictest precaution on the part of the United States; and the immediate exertion of the means we possess for securing the rightful possession of the territory of the United States, and for protecting the citizens and their property from the hostile encroachments of our neighbours, the Spaniards. You will, therefore, with as little delay as practicable, repair to the Territory of Orleans or its vicinity, and take upon yourself the command of the troops in that quarter, together with such militia or volunteers as may turn out for the defense of the country. And you will, by all the means in your power, repel any invasion of the territory of the United States east of the River Sabine, or north or west of the bounds of what has been called West Florida."

There could be no mistaking the meaning of these orders; they were explicit and final. Though it was true "every day increased our prospects of war," as the General wrote, he was detained in St. Louis for three months by "various and unavoidable obstacles." What these distressing impediments were we are left to surmise. Certain it is the petty political intrigue between

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. xc.

himself on the one side and Major Bruff and Colonel Hammond on the other offers no explanation.<sup>1</sup> He wrote John Smith very soon after the receipt of the dispatch of May 6th: "I shall obey the military mandate, for there I look for fame and honor." He was therefore apparently eager to proceed. Why the delay? Is it not possible that Clark gave us the key when he said that the General wrote Burr, "I shall be ready before you"? His procrastination was deliberate, and could have been for no other purpose than to await the development of the conspiracy.

Wilkinson landed in Natchez the night of September 7th, and the next day outlined his programme to Dearborn: "I shall drain the cup of conciliation to maintain the peace of our country," he vaunted; but in the preceding paragraph he had remarked that he hoped the Spaniards would remain at Bayou Pierre until he arrived, and he had taken occasion to say that both Meade and Claiborne favored expelling the enemy altogether, not leaving them so much as a guard at Bayou Pierre.

"Governor Claiborne has, I understand, arrayed the militia in the western counties of the Territory of Orleans," he continued,<sup>2</sup> "but I shall discourage their march until I have penetrated the designs of the Spaniard, and may find him deaf to the solemn appeal which I shall make to his understanding, his interest, and his duty. . . . Should I be forced to appeal to arms, to drive them effectually beyond the Sabine or cut them

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson to Dearborn, June 17, 1806; Jefferson MSS. John Smith to Jefferson, August 8, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

<sup>2</sup>Wilkinson to Smith, June 17, 1806; Jefferson MSS.

<sup>3</sup>Wilkinson to Dearborn, September 8, 1806; *Annals of Congress, 1807-08, Ap., p. 568.*

up, I shall endeavor to procure about four or five hundred dragoons and mounted militia from the two territories. . . . A blow once struck, it would appear expedient that we should make every advantage of it; and if men and means are furnished I will soon plant our standards on the left bank of Grand River."

The "designs of the Spaniard" must have been seen at a glance, for at no moment was the march of the militia discouraged. Moreover, to have spoken of designs was deliberate and calculated to work on the fears of the Government; he had assumed the extraordinary rôle he was to play to the end. While inditing this to Dearborn he was making arrangements with Governor Meade for the volunteers of Mississippi Territory to join him, and giving orders for the strengthening of various posts. Pointe Coupée was to be re-enforced with seventy-five men, which number, with a detachment of militia, he thought sufficient to capture the Spanish Governor, Grand Pré, with his garrison in Baton Rouge. Two hundred militia were to be added to the force on the Tombigbee, and the commander was to be ready to invest Mobile, while another body was to make a feint on Pensacola to prevent reënforcements being sent to the former. These instructions given, Wilkinson started for the front via Rapides on the Red River, at which place Claiborne awaited him. On the nineteenth the General appeared. He then addressed the Governor, discussing the menacing attitude of Spain, and advising the issuance of a proclamation interdicting intercourse between the contending parties, save as regulated under passports. He argued that this was warranted because of the vigorous policy pursued

by the enemy in permitting no one to pass to Nacogdoches unless known to be attached to Spain. Through this system of intercourse they were advised of all our plans, while we remained ignorant of theirs. Next he asked for the troops in New Orleans and every militiaman to be spared, and he wanted them to assemble at Natchitoches early in October.<sup>1</sup> Claiborne replied the same day that he could not issue the proclamation for fear of retaliatory measures being pursued by West Florida; the same effect, he thought, might be produced by prohibiting communications through Natchitoches, the only open route. Wilkinson could close this by issuing an order to prevent the passage of provisions to the Spaniards. As to the militia, the Governor promised a force of four hundred; the rest, because of the nature of the country to be defended, were to be reserved for emergencies.<sup>2</sup> Claiborne's steps had been taken with a view to war, and he urged upon the General that "no time ought to be lost in preparing to vindicate the national rights."

The inhabitants of the rural districts thought likewise. They came with such alacrity that in one instance a call for one hundred volunteers was answered by two hundred and fifteen. October 3d was the day appointed for the general rendezvous at Natchitoches, the headquarters of the American army, which place Wilkinson reached September 22d, two weeks having been spent on a journey accomplished in three days and a half on his return. If Claiborne and the people were

<sup>1</sup>Journal, pp. 285-288.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, pp. 289-290.

chafing under delay and were eager to drive back the Dons, the commander of the army was still moving leisurely. The day Wilkinson left Rapides the Governor started for New Orleans, and the evening of October 6th reëntered his capital, where things were in a stir of excitement. The news that war was impending was hailed with enthusiasm. The *Orleans Gazette*, the leading journal of the city and the mouth-piece of the Americans, came out in a long article, which, after having announced that General Wilkinson had gone to the frontier, gave vent to pure revolutionary sentiment:—

“We are happy to learn that the Government has at length issued positive orders to repel the aggressions of our enemies by force. We have indeed suffered from them, almost beyond human endurance. Their intrigues to disturb the repose of this country; their maintaining possession of our territory between the Mississippi and Perdido for upwards of two years; their outrageous conduct towards our citizens on the banks of the Tombigbee;—these and a thousand other injuries and insults demand instant redress. . . . If the enemy be forced to recross the Sabine, he must be driven still farther; for it would be idle to suffer him to remain there quietly until he received reinforcements from the Southern provinces, which could easily be furnished him, inasmuch as the route from Natchitoches to Mexico is clear, plain, and open; and the country through which it passes well stored with cattle and forage. How it may be proper to pursue the enemy is a question of policy for our Government to decide. On this we may sincerely rely that our President, who had so large a share in accomplishing the independence of the United States, will seize with eagerness and exultation an honorable occasion that may offer for conferring on our oppressed Spanish brethren in Mexico those inestimable blessings of freedom which we ourselves enjoy.

. . . Gallant Louisianians! now is the time to distinguish yourselves. . . . Should the generous efforts of our Government to establish a free, independent republican empire in Mexico be successful, how fortunate, how enviable would be the situation in New Orleans! The deposit at once of the countless treasures of the South, and the inexhaustible fertility of the Western States, we would soon rival and outshine the most opulent cities of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

This language seems none the less remarkable when we know that it came from the pen of Editor Bradford, who, a few weeks later, was throttled by Wilkinson on a charge of misprision of treason against the United States. He was a coadjutor of Burr, to whose enterprise he doubtless referred when he wrote that the President would seize with eagerness and exultation *an honorable occasion* “for conferring on our oppressed Spanish brethren in Mexico those inestimable blessings of freedom which we ourselves enjoy.” The document truly exhibits the underlying motives in all great revolutionary movements—the vindication of rights, the freeing of oppressed peoples, and finally the material reward. If war with Spain was avoided for almost a century, it was not for lack of moral support that it failed in 1806; nor does this admission do justice to the revolutionary audience that applauded the sentiments uttered by the *Orleans Gazette*, nor to the men who hurried to arms at the call of danger.

From Fort Adams and Natchez came the news that every preparation was being made to repel the Spanish encroachments, and that all the regular troops had

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, September 23, 1806.



marched under Captain Sparks for Natchitoches. Major Ferdinand L. Claiborne was expected to pass toward the frontier at any hour at the head of the Mississippi militia and Captain Farrar's dragoons.<sup>1</sup> October 8th Claiborne informed the Secretary of War that the militia from the frontier counties, more than five hundred strong, had reported at Natchitoches, and that a detachment of one hundred regulars with military stores would set out in a few days from New Orleans.<sup>2</sup> Thus the American Army in the West rapidly concentrated at the old French trading post. The temper of the volunteers was no longer questioned. Claiborne wrote Dearborn on the twelfth that he was surprised at the readiness with which the ancient Louisianians took up arms. He conveyed also the intelligence that Wilkinson had written in his last letter (dated September 25th) that unless his orders were countermanded he "would soon have a meeting with the Spaniards."<sup>3</sup> It looked as though the fate of the nation as to peace or war hung on Wilkinson's word.

This was the war which was to have called Burr's expedition into open array. Senator Adair avowed that "on this war taking place he [Burr] calculated with certainty, as well from the policy of the measure at the time, as from the positive assurances of Wilkinson, who seemed to have the power to force it in his hands."<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson had gone further in his confidence with Adair, and, after the failure of the conspiracy,

<sup>1</sup>*Orleans Gazette*, October 3, 1806.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup>Journal, p. 311.

<sup>4</sup>Letter of General Adair, dated Washington City, March 4, 1807.

attempted to disparage his character, accusing the Kentuckian of having gone to New Orleans in the fall of 1806 in the "dark."<sup>1</sup> Adair retaliated, quoting from the General's letters. In answer to a question in Adair's correspondence of January 27th—"Pray how far is it, and what kind of way from St. Louis to Santa Fé, and from thence to Mexico?"<sup>2</sup>—Wilkinson wrote:

"Do you know that I have reserved these places for my own triumphal entry, that I have been reconnoitering and exploring the route for sixteen years; that I not only know the way, but all the difficulties and how to surmount them? I wish we could get leave, Mexico would soon be ours."

More significant is his letter of September 28th from Natchitoches, in which Adair was assured that within six or eight days the sword would be drawn:

"The time long looked for by many and wished for by more, has now arrived for subverting the Spanish government in Mexico. Be you ready and join me; we will want little more than light-armed troops with a few ——— More will be done by marching than fighting; 5,000 men will give us to Rio ———; 10,000 to ———; we must here divide our army into three parts and will then require 30,000 men to conquer the whole of the provinces of Mexico. We cannot fail of success."<sup>3</sup>

Adair challenged the President to look into Wilkinson's conduct: "The Executive of the United States

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson's Letter, *Palladium*, May 21, 1807.

<sup>2</sup>Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, ii., Ap. lxxvii.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Editor Bradford of the *Orleans Gazette*, published June 16, 1807; copied in the *Palladium* for July 16th. The blanks are in the copy.







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